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+
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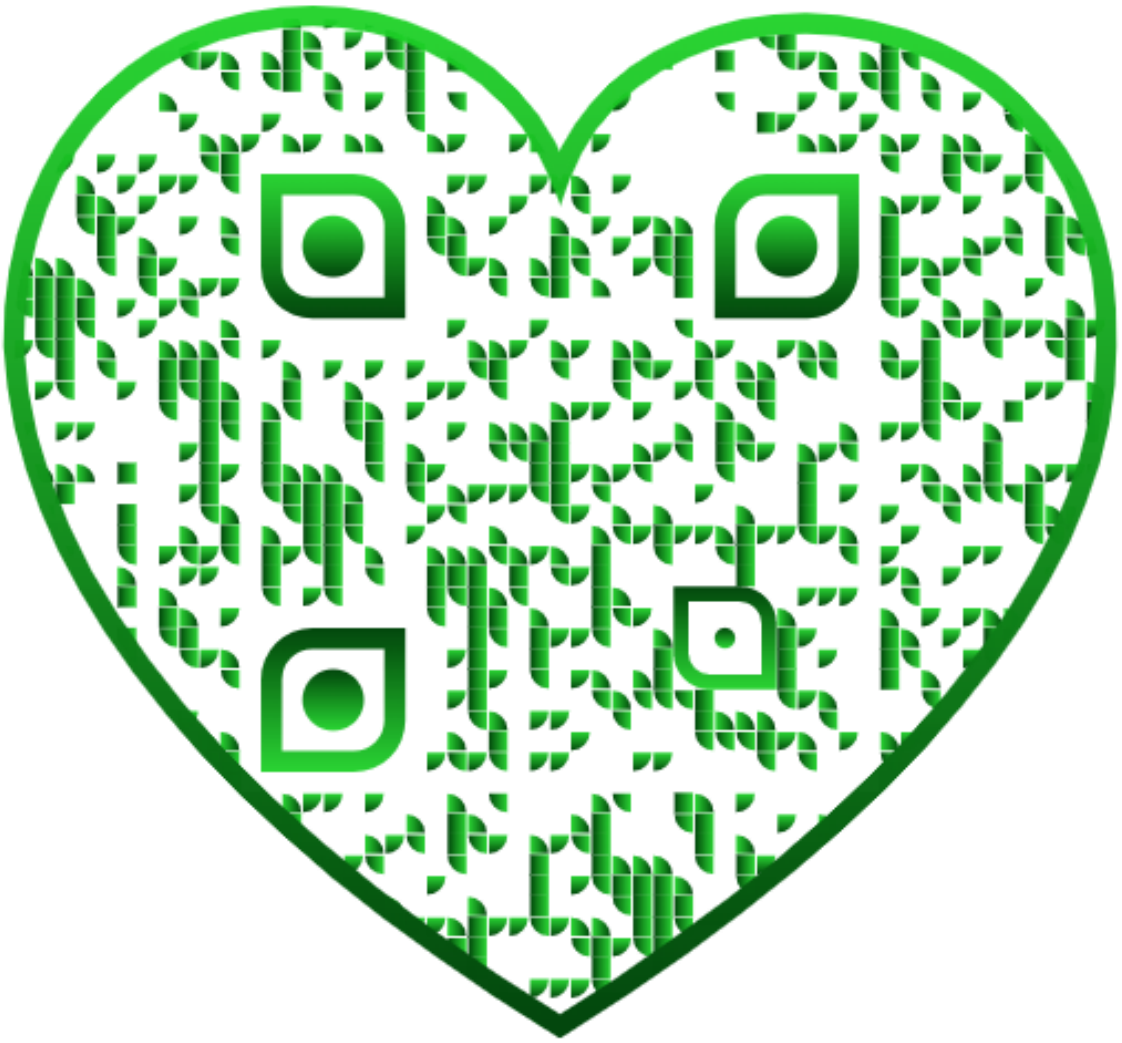
ISSUE 372



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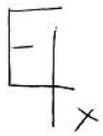
SABATON & BABYMETAL = SABAMETAL? BABYTON?

WHEN IT CAME to choosing this month's cover, we couldn't decide between Sabaton and Babymetal – so we did them both! Four years ago, Sabaton frontman Joakim Brodén guested on Babymetal song *Oh! MAJINAI* – and now his band are set to take them out on a UK arena tour come April.

In anticipation of that tour, we flew to both bands' home countries to witness their live shows in person. In Sweden, Sabaton took over Visby, a village on an *actual island* known for its former battles, old churches and medieval re-enactments. In Japan, just 30 miles from Tokyo, Babymetal returned from their hiatus with two high-gloss, high-octane shows full of big reveals. We also grilled them about their new album, *The Other One*, and *that* potential third member. Plus, we hung out with a group of the most dedicated Babymetal fans we've ever met. The Fox God must surely be thrilled.

They might belong to different subgenres, but both bands are brilliant examples of metal's imagination. And whichever cover you got, we hope you love it. All that's left to decide on is their combined name. Sabametal? Babyton? Let us know what you reckon…

Camo on and Kitsunes up!



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SCAN TO GET OUR WEEKLY NEWSLETTER

MEET THE BAND

DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR
No stranger to following Sabaton around Europe, we packed Associate Editor Dave off to the Swedish island of Gotland to get the inside story on their latest campaign strategy. It was exceptionally cold. Sorry, Dave.

STEVE BRIGHT
PHOTOGRAPHER
Photographer Steve took the fantastic photos of Sabaton you see on the cover and inside these pages. Again, it was exceptionally cold (sorry, Steve) but he managed to capture their relentless determination and drive.

CATHERINE MORRIS
WRITER
A fount of knowledge and joy when it comes to all things symphonic metal, we sent Catherine to review Tarja and Temperance in London. Suffice to say, she had the Loveliest Of Times. You can read all about it over on p.100.

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FRONT ROW

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17 In the studio with pioneering post-punks **GRAVE PLEASURES**.
18 Get your Life Lessons from **ENSLAVED**'s Ivar Bjørnson.
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LIVE REVIEWS

96 TRIVIUM recharge the faithful at the legendary Hammersmith.
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99 Shamanic magicians **HEILUNG** invoke a primal spectacle.
100 TARJA TURUNEN hits yet another high note.
101 The stars, and strings, align for **APOCALYPTICA** and **EPICA**.
103 LIFE OF AGONY's classic debut unites the generations.

SUBSCRIBE NOW & SAVE
Head to p.34 for details

THE BIG PICTURE

WHISKY A GO-GOAT

MANNEQUINS OF A young Papa Nihil and his Nameless Ghouls went on display during a Ghost pop-up event at LA's legendary Whisky A Go Go. The installation was designed to represent the band's 'first gig' at the venue, back when Nihil was their singer in the 60s. In reality, it was a celebration of the band's 2019 EP, *Seven Inches Of Satanic Panic*, which features *Kiss The Go-Goat* and the now-viral *Mary On A Cross*.

In true Ghost fashion, the museum-style event, held on February 1, was equal parts mysterious and ridiculous, with exhibits of their 'history' ranging from a napkin sketch of the first Ghost logo to a still of a *Scooby-Doo* episode featuring Papa. The dummies of the Nameless Ghouls and the young Nihil were overseen by a youthful dummy of Sister Imperator – thought to be his lover – mimicking the *Kiss The Go-Goat* video.

There's no word yet on how this plays into the Ghost narrative and the newly ascended Papa Emeritus IV (formerly Cardinal Copia), but given the viral success of *Mary On A Cross*, plus the band's penchant for following up each album with an EP, we'd bet this isn't the last we've seen of the young Papa Nihil.

JEREMY SAFFER

ISKY a GOGO
WHISKY a GOGO
HOLLYWOOD, CA
Ghost

THE HOT TOPIC

WHEN VEGANS ATTACK

Electronica musician Moby has teamed up with legends of our world for a surprising new activism documentary

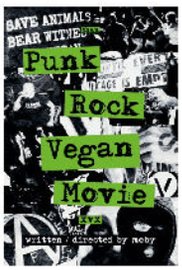
WORDS: RICH HOBSON

English punks Crass onstage

Hardcore punk royalty John 'Porcell' Porcelly of Youth Of Today and Bad Brains' H.R. (right) feature in the movie

YOU MAY THINK it's strange that Moby – writer of the kind of chill-out anthems you might hear in a spa – has made a documentary about hardcore punk and vegan activism. He's aware of this. In his documentary, *Punk Rock Vegan Movie*, a talking dog (yes, really) asks him the question: "If you make pretty Enya music, then why are you making a punk rock movie?"

"These genres of music that are usually seen as being the most aggressive, the heaviest, the loudest… they're also the most conscious," the 57-year-old explains to *Hammer* today. "There are way more activist punk rockers and metal musicians than there are indie rockers, and it's surprising how people still don't understand that. I had one friend who said she thought punk was just about wearing leather jackets and punching each other in the face!"



"MY FRIEND THOUGHT PUNK WAS JUST WEARING LEATHER JACKETS AND PUNCHING EACH OTHER IN THE FACE!"

In the early 80s, long before Moby was racking up gold and platinum certifications as an electronica artist, he was a fixture of New York's vibrant hardcore scene. Then going by his birth name of Richard Hall, he discovered veganism and the animal rights movement while playing in the band Vatican Commandos. He would eventually move on from his punk roots, but he still pinned his colours to the mast with 1996's *Animal Rights* album, and has remained a loyal fan of loud, noisy music ever since.

Moby's directorial debut, *Punk Rock Vegan Movie*, is a continuation of that passion, exploring the links and shared history between the punk, metal and alternative scenes of the early 80s and the animal rights movement. Along the way, he speaks to a ludicrously long list of musicians and other contributors, from punk legends Captain Sensible (The Damned) and Steve Ignorant (Crass), to the likes of Rob Zombie, Dave Navarro (Jane's Addiction), Alissa White-Gluz (Arch Enemy) and Ian MacKaye (Fugazi/Minor Threat).

"Getting people like Steve and Ian involved felt like getting a blessing from the ethical gods of punk rock," Moby admits. "I didn't even know Ian was a vegan and had been since the 80s, because he never talks about it. In fairness, there were a lot of metal musicians involved too, so maybe I should have called it the 'Punk Rock Metal Vegan Movie'!"

Unlike some music documentaries that focus on who played where first, and who had the maddest shows, *Punk Rock Vegan Movie* examines the spirit and principles behind punk and hardcore, using the stories of each band and musician to flesh out a narrative of activism and a sense of indignation that runs throughout the genre.

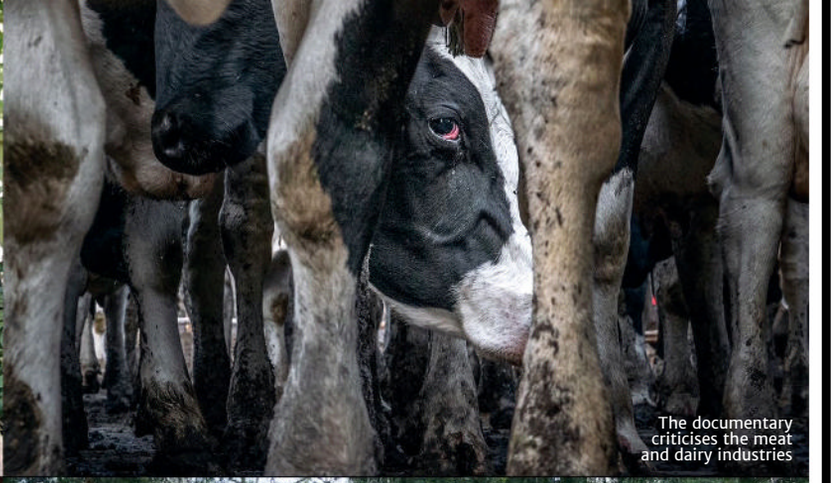
"The ethos behind punk rock is that you question everything from a perspective of intelligence and ethics," Moby explains. "If things don't conform to what you want, you work to change them."

The music is a launchpad for the movie's exploration of environmental consciousness and animal rights, and although Moby doesn't approach the topics with a sense of fire and brimstone, he certainly doesn't pull any punches, showing stills and footage of animals raised on industrial farms.

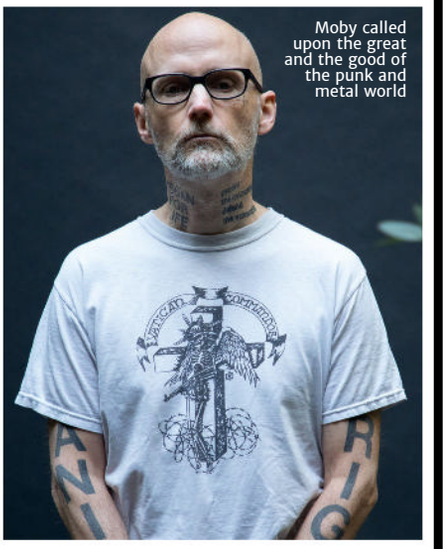
Moby admits his own journey to veganism began with tentative steps – and advice from a metal legend.

PRESS

This dog talks!


The documentary criticises the meat and dairy industries

This choir sings Gorilla Biscuits song *Cats And Dogs*, which asks why people keep pets but still eat animals


Moby called upon the great and the good of the punk and metal world

"I once had this conversation with [Black Sabbath bassist] Geezer Butler, and credit to him, because he's the original; he went vegan in the 60s and was pioneering the way before anyone," he explains. "But we were saying we realised it was hypocritical to love animals but still be part of this thing that causes them misery and death. So I went vegetarian in the early 80s, and then went vegan a few years later."

Although *Punk Rock Vegan Movie* concerns animal rights, Moby doesn't get sanctimonious about the subject. In fact, he admits the documentary was born from a desire to make a change, in his life and in those of others, after he came to terms with personal issues of substance abuse.

"I realised I was very selfish," he says matter-of-factly. "The paradox is that selfishness doesn't make people happy – you look at Trump, Elon Musk or Kanye, these incredibly successful and wealthy people, and they're all miserable. So I got more involved – in politics, in activism."

Made over several years, *Punk Rock Vegan Movie* premiered at the 2023 Slamdance Festival in the US. In keeping with his desire to enact change, Moby was determined to find a way to host the movie online for free, so that anyone can watch it.

"It's an interesting way to release a movie, because there's no real commercial aspect," he admits. "I made *Punk Rock Vegan Movie* because I didn't know if there was anyone else trying to tell this story and *somebody* had to." H

WATCH *PUNK ROCK VEGAN MOVIE* ON YOUTUBE NOW

OZZY: PRESS/ROSS HALFIN

10 THINGS WE LEARNED THIS MONTH

What's been blowing our tiny brains

OZZY OSBOURNE HAS RETIRED FROM TOURING...
He cancelled the No More Tours 2 run due to ill health, but his team is looking into ways he can still play live.

...BUT HE CLEANED UP AT THE GRAMMYS
The Ozzman won Best Rock Album for *Patient Number 9*, and Best Metal Performance for song *Degradation Rules*.

MARGOT ROBBIE IS A DEFENDER OF THE FAITH
She defended metal to a sceptical Cate Blanchett on *The Graham Norton Show*.

No more tours from Ozzy

SOMEONE MIXED UP THE 1975'S MATT HEALY WITH MATT HEAFY
But the Trivs man sent "the nicest message" to the fan who erroneously bought a Cameo video from him.

SLEEP TOKEN ARE... SEXY?
On TikTok, fans have been getting hot under the collar for new single *The Summoning*. Speaking of which...

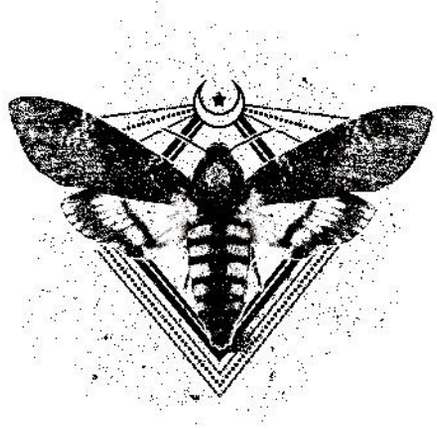
SKINDRED ARE TIKTOK'S NEWEST STARS
Classic tune *Nobody* has prompted a dance craze. Nice to see the rest of the world is finally catching on.

TOMMY LEE IS AT IT AGAIN
He showed his crown jewels on the internet, again. This time from behind. He tagged Mr. Peanut, the mascot of a US snack company.

PAUL STANLEY DOESN'T MIME
But longtime Kiss manager Doc McGhee did admit he uses backing tracks.

KVLT DOESN'T MEAN CHIC
Swedish pop star Zara Larsson got flak for wearing a black-metal-themed dress, which featured a Burzum design. As she put it, "Oopsie."

METALLICA HAVE RAISED £3M
The money is for their All Within My Hands Foundation, and was generated by the band's concert/auction in December. Excellent stuff.



HOW CAN I LEARN THROAT SINGING?

The Hu have gone from viral sensations to all-conquering metal heroes, but how will bandleader Gala fare against your questions?

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

SINCE BURSTING ONTO our scene in 2018, Mongolian metallers The Hu have gone from strength to strength, selling out shows around the world and even cracking the charts with their 2019 debut, *The Gereg*. We sat down with bandleader Gala to talk powerlifting, shamanism, and whether we'll ever see a Babymetal x The Hu collaboration.

At what age did you learn to ride a horse?
Jack Dudfield, email
"Horseback riding comes easy for us – it probably has something to do with our DNA. Three-year-olds riding horses are a real thing in Mongolia. I learned to ride before I got into elementary school and it's my most fun summer memory. Safe riding and handling techniques are essential when we first start, so it's normally the father's or elder's job to teach you the safety around horses and techniques while riding as soon as you become able to grasp the subject."

If you could only listen to one artist for the rest of your life, who would it be?
Stratospheree, Twitter
"That's a very hard question! We listen to many artists at the same time so I don't have a preference for one artist – especially if I'm going to be listening to them for the rest of my life!"

Does pineapple belong on pizza?
Radu Patroiu, Facebook
"We are not Italians, so we can't really make statements about pizza! Ha ha! Whatever tastes good on pizza works for us. We like it meaty."

What was it like touring with Babymetal for three shows in 2019?
Parker Buessow, Facebook
"Babymetal are incredible! The way they perform is inspirational, and the energy is unmatchable. There's no doubt that we'll work with Babymetal again, because not only they are amazing artists, they're great touring company and we have fun together."

Do you practice shamanism? What role does shamanism play in modern Mongolia?
Ruth Harris, Twitter
"No, but we respect it. We respect every type of religion in this world, unless it's harmful to yourself or others. In modern Mongolia, just like the olden times, every religion is accepted and respected so we humbly live with each other. Shamans, priests and monks can live in the same city, nobody really cares. Mongolians only care whether you are a good or bad person, and that is evaluated by how you tolerate everyone else who is different than you."

What's your favourite Mongolian folk tale?
Kathy Li, email
"[Epics] *Geser* and *Jangar* are two of my favourite folk tales, and I'd recommend people read them. They depict the most valuable cultural treasures we have in Mongolia and give you a unique perspective of how our minds work."

How can I learn throat singing?
Sennaj_01, Twitter
"Understanding the throat singing concept is the first thing you have to do, so I'd recommend starting with a guidance book. After learning the technique, it's crucial to practise and practise. It's not a technique you learn overnight; the longer you practise, the more voice vibrance you will get."

Your music's featured in *Star Wars Jedi: Fallen Order* and *The Sims 4*. What's your favourite videogame of all time?
Louise Foster, email
"We tour heavily, so game consoles have become a great friend to let off some steam. *UFC* and soccer are currently our favourite, but when *Fallen Order* first came out, we played it non-stop, so we're looking forward to hopefully doing more collaborations with the *Star Wars* games and universe."

How does your popularity in Mongolia compare to overseas?
Hugh Mannity, Facebook
"Mongolians support us so much and I doubt there are many people who don't know The Hu or haven't heard of us in some form. We keep to our traditions when making rock music that is spreading worldwide, so we regularly meet people who are grateful and encouraging."

What are your hobbies?
Andy Burns, email
"We all love sport. Temka [Tovshuur] loves soccer, and Enkush [lead Morin

PRESS/ENKHBAT NYAMKHISHIG

The Hu (left to right):
Jaya, Enkush, Gala, Temka

"THREE-YEAR-OLDS RIDE HORSES IN MONGOLIA"

The Hu: local heroes on the world stage

Khuur/throat singing] wrestles and is interested in mixed martial arts. Jaya [jaw harp/Tsuur/flute/throat singing] prefers to be on horseback when we are in the countryside. I'm into powerlifting and learning to be quite good at it, too. As a group we love to hike. We pack our bags and go where our heart leads us. Mongolia is like something out of a book – the nature is always worth visiting."

A lot of your songs are about summoning a warrior spirit. What advice would you give to someone who is feeling depressed?
Jay Jones, email
"First of all, there has to be acceptance – to yourself and to your feelings. Next, you have to do the things that make you feel alive: listen to your favourite music, create art and do whatever makes you feel inspired. Depression brings hopelessness and that is a very hard feeling to escape, and sometimes the only way to let it pass you is gaining your inner strength back. Therefore, our music is always there to make you feel powerful and self-assured."

Who makes your amazing clothes?
Jess Alsopp, email
"We work with different Mongolian artists. The design concepts come from our producer, and designers enrich it with their ideas, so the collaborations become the outfits you see onstage. We are working towards bigger concepts in terms of stage outfits."

"WE HAVE A CONCEPT RECORD ON THE WAY!"

What led you to start a metal band and what bands inspired you?
Priscilla Clariza Stanforth, Facebook
"Metal and rock have always been dear to our hearts. Ever since we were children, the guitars and drums brought so much joy and freedom to us. Mixing traditional instruments and rock music became our passion ever since we learnt about the Hunnu rock genre."

A few years back, you shared an incredible recipe for Mongolian dumplings. What other Mongolian dishes would you recommend?
Harry Matthews, Facebook
"Mongolian Khorkhog has the flavour of the countryside. Essentially, it's lamb that is pressure cooked, but we add hot river stones to the meat to create more flavour. Herbs like wild thyme and wild onions are added to the meat. The soup that comes out of it is said to relieve bloating and stress, while the meat is so soft and full of vitamins, it tastes like nothing else. You have to go to the countryside and taste Khorkhog!"

What is the biggest misperception about Mongolian culture?
Matt Pennington, email
"Just because we have a nomadic culture, it doesn't mean that we don't have everything a 'developed' society would have. The biggest misconception is that people think we can only have either/or. We have the same number of developments as any other major city or country would have. Come visit and you'll see the delicate balance we keep in our society – you will be amazed. We have had so many questions like, 'Do you have electricity back home?' or 'Do you have internet?' etc. We have everything you can find in Western culture in Mongolia, if not more!"

Do you think The Hu will ever write a concept record?
Joakim Snope, email
"Concept records need a lot of planning and thinking, requiring a great many abilities from the artists and producer, so it'd take a lot of time for us to come up with an excellent concept record. Luckily, we have already started and one is on the way!"

What does it mean to be named the UNESCO Artist For Peace?
Andy Benton, Facebook
"We will be partnering with UNESCO to bring more awareness to indigenous languages and their use, as well as encouraging countries to keep their cultural differences intact. Music – songs, lyrics – help preserve a region's dialect and culture, especially when it comes to using traditional instruments that were used to perform the music historically. We cannot forget the importance of music when upholding any culture. That's why we are happy to be working with UNESCO; indigenous culture worldwide needs to be saved and preserved."

What is the biggest lesson we can learn from Mongolian culture?
Ajeet Mansukhani, Twitter
"Stamina and perseverance are the biggest characteristics you'll see from Mongolian culture. The environment we live in and the livelihoods we lead require much patience and understanding of nature. In each of our songs, we carry that message." H

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THE SLAYLIST

DEBBIE GOUGH

Heriot's snarling guitar-slinger picks the songs that hooked her on heaviness and noise

WORDS: RICH HOBSON

Debbie Gough: a bad bitch (during *Immaterial*, at least)

LISTEN NOW
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"**IN SCHOOL, ONE** of my friends gave another a copy of **LAMB OF GOD**'s *Resolution* at our lockers. I saw the album cover and was like, 'That looks so cool, I wonder what it sounds like…' so went home and searched for the album. *Ghost Walking* hooked me on heavier stuff – I can literally pinpoint it all back to that moment at the lockers. I'm almost mortified that I'm still so gushy about the band, knowing they like my band, and they even had us side-stage for their set at Bloodstock. But I love them so much that I'll die on the Lamb Of God hill.

"*Evan Perks* by **THE CHARIOT** helped me get into mathcore-type stuff and noise. There's this incredible video of a gig they played where the venue was closed, so they just played on the roof instead. I remember thinking that was the coolest thing ever and the energy they brought is unlike anything I've ever seen. It's pretty much how I want Heriot to be whenever we play.

"*Crystal Clear* was the first song I uploaded a video of myself singing, so it's special to me. I never really went down the Paramore hole when they first became huge, but I got **HAYLEY WILLIAMS**' solo album [*Petals For Armor*] during lockdown and it was so wicked, I could listen to that song forever. The production is amazing, and it's put together so perfectly, I wish I'd written it. I also wish I'd written *Planet Golem* by **WAND**. It makes me feel like I'm floating off into a space cloud whenever I hear it. They're really underrated in the realms of heavy music; they have these elements of dark shoegaze that are just incredible.

"You can have pissed-off songs or party songs, but some just go a lot deeper. *Amelia* by **TONIGHT ALIVE** is basically about losing somebody – it's quite a depressing song, really! But over the years you lose people, and whenever it happens to me that's the song I'll go to. It's my grieving song, and says a lot of the things that you'd want to say to a loved one. I feel similarly about *Without Any Words (Only Crying And Laughter)* by **'68**. I was really close to my nan, I lived with her and cared for her, so when she passed away that song helped me through. I don't even know if the song is about grief, but that was how I interpreted it. I must have had it on repeat for months – it might be morbid, but that's why it meant so much to me.

"The lyrics to **CANCER BATS**' *Harem Of Scorpions* are so cool. I listen to that song whenever I feel like I'm not going anywhere or achieving anything, because the message is striking, telling you to make every moment count. I love Cancer Bats and, other than bands we've toured with, I think they're the band I've seen most – 15 or 16 times. They perk me up every time. I've also seen **BRUTUS** live something like seven times. I'm so in love with them that I've cried every single time I've seen them live. The talent in the band is so overwhelming. *Bye Julia* is one of their best songs, even though it's not on an album or anything.

"Who doesn't love *Kiss From A Rose* by **SEAL**? In one of my old bands, we used to play it relentlessly during the car journeys to and from shows – at our farewell show, we even played a really bad rendition of it. Any time I hear it in public, I still message the guys from that band, because it still makes me laugh thinking of being young. *Immaterial* by **SOPHIE** is my bad bitch song! Ha ha ha! If I have to do something important, or something that puts me outside my comfort zone, I'll blast that in my car. There's something so happy about it and it just makes me feel like I'm that girl. Even if it's only for three minutes, those three minutes I am *living*."

"I'M ALMOST MORTIFIED THAT I'M SO GUSHY ABOUT LAMB OF GOD!"

HERIOT'S NEW SINGLE, *DEMURE*, IS OUT NOW. THEY TOUR THE UK IN MAY AND PLAY DAMNATION FESTIVAL IN NOVEMBER

PRESS/HARRY

IN THE STUDIO

GRAVE PLEASURES

Finnish post-punks prove that not all goth is gloom

WORDS: PARIS FAWCETT

Mat McNerney kneels at the altar of goth

WITH 2017's *MOTHERBLOOD*, Grave Pleasures became one of the most exciting bands of the gothic revival. The Finns captured the macabre of Bauhaus and gloomy psychedelia of Echo And The Bunnymen, all while writing choruses that made the apocalypse sound riotously fun. Six years on, they're finally ready to present *Plagueboys*, which by all indications is their most haunting offering yet.

We thought Grave Pleasures had disappeared. Where'd you go?
Mat McNerney (vocals): "*Motherblood* took a long time to take off. By the end of our touring cycle, the album had only just begun to break out due to word of mouth. We felt like we were just working on the live show and then we took a couple of years to write a follow-up. But then Covid was here, we couldn't get out to play and there was no way to release *Plagueboys*."

Were you worried that the fans wouldn't be there anymore after a long gap?
"[Our first album] *Dreamcrash* was such a crash. It got some critical success, but among the fans it's a dividing album. To have had that already, and to also have changed our name from Beastmilk, when there was a buzz around us, we were prepared for anything. The best thing that can happen to an artist is to not take off when everybody imagined that we were going to, because then we can just start from zero every time."

What's inspired *Plagueboys*' sound?
"One of the biggest references was *In The Lion's Mouth* by The Sound. There were things in the production and drumming that we were going for and used. I've also rediscovered Elvis Costello And The Attractions. We were focused on being great songwriters and getting to the root of what great songwriting is. It's those songs where you can get a real sense of depth but they're also catchy and enjoyable."

How have you expanded lyrically and thematically since *Motherblood*?
"I'm constantly trying to understand how you can communicate themes of death without explicitly saying 'death'. The idea of a skull is more interesting than an actual skull because of the connotations it brings up. I'm into suggestive horror – we're trying to explore how you make sounds which are aggressive, but without using a lot of distortion in the way you would if you were a death metal band. I want to touch the same things that death metal did for me when I was younger without going there."

Where did the name '*Plagueboys*' come from?
"We had this lyric, *'A plague rolls through the quiet dales'*. I got that from a British newspaper that was discussing Covid; you have this peaceful countryside and there's nothing to stop this wave rolling through. I liked that juxtaposition of a silent threat in a beautiful setting. Children are the idea of innocence but then there's this disease taking hold."

Tekla Vály's album artwork is terrifying. How did that come along?
"I've been reading *Lord Of The Flies* and wanted the artwork to reflect the idea of feral children, as I feel in a way that's how society is at the moment. We're abandoned to our own devices and trying to structure a civilisation that maybe isn't fit for purpose anymore. You don't know who to trust."

When Grave Pleasures broke, there weren't many bands making explicitly gothic music. Do you feel that goth-rock has since made a comeback?
"I think it has. There's a band that cites us as influences called Unto Others. It's a cool band but a more acceptable form of what we do. We're way more pop and leftfield, they're like a heavy metal version of that… I think bands like us need to exist to evolve the scene." MH

***PLAGUEBOYS* IS DUE OUT ON APRIL 21 VIA CENTURY MEDIA**

THE FACTS

ALBUM: 3

PRODUCER: Juho Vanhanen and Niko Lehdontie

STUDIO: Finnvox Studios (Helsinki, Finland), Space Junk Studio (Tampere, Finland), Pine Hill Burrow

EXPECT: Seductive, pop-laden post-punk to soundtrack the end of the world

PRESS

LIFE LESSONS

IVAR BJØRNSON

From black metal's violence to Peter Steele's threesomes, the Enslaved mastermind has seen it all and somehow survived

WORDS: MATT MILLS

IVAR BJØRNSON NEVER set out to be a rock star. All he ever wanted to do was write songs – and as the 32-year-tenured lead composer for progressive black metallers Enslaved, he's living the dream. From his adolescence in Norway's black metal scene to touring the States in a beat-up van, these are the things he's learned in three decades of genre-pioneering music.

BLACK METAL WAS REVENGE AGAINST HIPPIES

"My parents were hippies; all the black metal kids had hippie parents – [our music] was our revenge against the hippies, I guess."

BUT I DID BOND WITH MY DAD OVER MUSIC

"My parents were divorced. My dad lived in Haugesund and every Saturday he and his new wife invited friends over. I remember, he pulled out his guitar to play *All Along The Watchtower* and I was fascinated by these people all being in love with music. Aged eight, I asked my dad, 'Can I do this with you somehow?'"

ANTHRAX WERE MY FIRST OBSESSION

"At 10, I heard Anthrax on the radio, then they had a show in Oslo. It was so awesome! Every time at school, if the assignment was 'Write about something you're interested in', I'd bring in a boombox and play Anthrax incredibly loudly. My teacher would go red-faced: 'Thank you, that's enough!' The next class would be: 'Write about a country you're interested in.' I'd put, 'This is the USA, where Anthrax are from.' Out came the boombox. [Everyone thought,] 'Oh my god, this kid…'"

THRASH WAS EVERYTHING

"I had a thrash band called Obnoxious with my friends when I was 10. I saw posters of Mille [Petrozza] from Kreator where he kept his hair in front of his face, so I never took my hair away from my face, even at dinner. My parents were crying and threatened everything from 'We'll take away your guitar' to 'We'll cut your hair!'"

EURONYMOUS WAS A FRIEND AND MENTOR

"I was lucky to get to know Euronymous [Mayhem guitarist and Norwegian black metal ringleader Øystein Aarseth], because I was such a small kid. Whatever esoteric, Satanic beliefs he had, he didn't discuss them with me. All that we had in common was music and guitars. I remember going into his record shop [Helvete] and trying to impress him: 'Do you have anything extreme?' He was like, 'Shut the fuck up! Listen to this!' and gave me some Norwegian prog."

BLACK METAL ISN'T INHERENTLY RIGHT-WING

"People connect Norwegian black metal with politically problematic things on the righter side, but Euronymous was very community orientated. He was an outspoken communist. He would have been very against what came along later, when black metal became about positioning yourself above others."

ENSLAVED AREN'T TRUE BLACK METAL

"Euronymous, at some point, told us that some people in the scene had expressed concern that Enslaved were so close to black metal while our ideology, the Norse mythology, had too much love and peace in it. When the term 'true Norwegian black metal' was coined, the people it was for – Mayhem, Burzum, Emperor, Gorgoroth – agreed it meant 'metal with a Satanic ideology'. By that definition, Sammy Davis Jr, with his Church Of Satan membership, is more black metal than Enslaved, who sounded like black metal but with no Satanic ideology whatsoever."

BEING DIFFERENT MADE ME A TARGET

"During the difficult days where people [in Norway] were paranoid about Satanists, a guy got way too drunk and was this bad combination of a good Christian and a karate expert. I had some kind of black metal back print on my jacket and just heard, 'You fucking Satanist!' Then everything went black. Witnesses told me I got a flying kick to the back of the head and he smashed my head against the edge of the kerb a few times. They ran after him but he was too fast. That was on my 16th birthday."

YOUR BANDMATES SHOULD BE YOUR BEST MATES

"I found out that Euronymous had been murdered by watching the morning news. It was horrible, but I'm glad that me and Grutle [Kjellson, Enslaved singer and bassist] have been through this entire journey together. He had an even closer relationship with Euronymous; since they were [closer to] the same age, they could discuss vinyl collections and women and more grown-up stuff. It would've been pretty bad if it weren't for us being a duo and talking about it quite a lot."

THERE'S NO SEPARATING THE ARTIST AND THE ART FOR SOME PEOPLE

"It was just a couple of years ago that [Euronymous's murderer, Burzum founder and far-right extremist] Varg Vikernes stopped bad-mouthing the people that were 'on his side', but there's no side to be on in his case. It's devastating because what he created was so unique and now it's impossible to enjoy it. The stuff that he created was groundbreaking and is still affecting music and art in a major way, and it's too bad that it's so tainted by what happened on a personal level." ▶

"WHATEVER ESOTERIC, SATANIC BELIEFS EURONYMOUS HAD, HE DIDN'T DISCUSS THEM WITH ME"

PRESS

Life has been a wild ride so far for Ivar

ALWAYS REMEMBER YOUR VISA

"I was 17 and got a letter from someone saying a friend of his in New York was a promoter and wanted Enslaved to do a US tour. We agreed and got on one of the last flights where you were still allowed to smoke on the plane. We dressed up as tourists because we didn't have working visas; we were in Hawaiian shirts, smoking, asking for beers. We went through customs yelling, 'We're not a band! We're just tourists!' At that point they were like, 'Whatever. Shut the fuck up.'"

SOMETIMES, STANDING OUT HELPS

"On that tour, we basically had to down vodka to get to sleep. We had a van and two drivers and we all had to sit on the floor. We broke down in the South Bronx. Grutle woke up and sleepwalked through the Bronx, with no t-shirt on, yelling, 'I'm Santa Claus! Do you want any presents?' We ran around looking for him until somebody told us about this dude with bleached hair and a silly moustache walking around."

METAL OUTFITS LOOK COOL, BUT AREN'T ALWAYS PRACTICAL

"We did 12 shows in 14 days in Mexico. Some of them were in the countryside, with no roof on the venue. We had our Viking gear with us, since we were touring [second album, 1994's] *Frost*. The first show, we got onstage to play the first song and Grutle had his replica helmet on. The minute his nose protector touches the mic, he's zapped by all the electricity in the building and starts shaking. Then the promoter scammed us by leaving us behind in some city we didn't even know. He was just gone. Finally, we found someone who got us onto a bus to El Paso. It was a 28-hour journey and we had diarrhoea, but we still thought, 'This is the best time ever.'"

"WE'RE NOT BLACK METAL, BUT WE'RE GOING TO SHOW YOU HOW IT'S DONE"

SEIZE EVERY OPPORTUNITY YOU CAN GET

"While in the US, we got an offer from [Type O Negative frontman] Peter Steele to do a full support tour. Me and Grutle were both like, 'Ah, shit! We need to go back to school in August!' But how the fuck were we gonna say 'No, thank you' to Peter Steele, so we could go to school? We were playing the same festival in New Jersey and, when we were invited onto his tour bus, we saw he had a *Frost* CD. He was really into black metal. We were hanging out for almost an hour and then some guy came in with a couple of girls: 'You have a meeting in the back, Mr Steele.' He was like, 'Excuse me,' and went into the back lounge, which had a heart-shaped bed in it. I later understood that this thing they called 'a meeting' was probably not!"

FOLLOW YOUR OWN PATH AND STICK TO IT

"I remember this super-black metal lady coming up to me in Bergen after [2000 album] *Mardraum* came out and saying, really close to my face, 'I'm so disappointed. I'm never going to listen to Enslaved again.' I felt so happy. 'This is fucking fantastic,' I thought. 'We did the right thing!' I pretended to be really offended – 'Oh, I'm really sorry that we disappointed you' – but I don't think I pulled it off. I just walked off."

BLACK METAL NEEDS TO OPEN UP TO THRIVE

"I wish there were more bands both conserving and experimenting with black metal. There's an ocean of bands giving the impression that they've just hung up their weekday jacket and are putting on their black metal jacket because it's Friday and they want to be the bad guy in the school yard. It doesn't create the same wonderment. There's a bit of arrogance in *Congelia* [a song on Enslaved's new album, *Heimdal*], because a part of me wanted to say, 'We're not a black metal band, but we're going to show you how it's done.'"

***HEIMDAL* IS OUT ON MARCH 3 VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

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THE STORY BEHIND

ANCHOR
CAVE IN

Cave In were underground metalcore darlings, but 2003's *Antenna* was their shot at the big time – and it almost ended the band for good

WORDS: STEPHEN HILL

THE METAL SCENE was itching for something fresh as the new millennium dawned. Ever since grunge had up-ended trad metal at the start of the 90s, the scene had been rapidly evolving in sound and aesthetic, but by 2000 even nu metal was looking decidedly dog-eared. Unsurprisingly, industry eyes (and ears) began to scour the underground, digging into the fertile grounds of post-hardcore, emo and metalcore to find the next big thing.

Bands like Glassjaw, AFI, and At The Drive In, who had spent much of the decade without troubling the eyes and ears of the mainstream were suddenly being courted by major labels, thrust onto magazine covers and getting heavy airplay on MTV. But while many found themselves struggling to adapt to their newfound interest and fame, none were more prepared than Cave In.

The Boston quartet had created a true underground metalcore classic with their 1999 debut, *Until Your Heart Stops*, then followed it up two years later with the groundbreaking *Jupiter*. Stripping away the molten fury of *Until Your Heart Stops* and replacing it with beautiful, shimmering progressive space rock, it confused the underground, but made a whole new section of music fans sit bolt upright. It also caught the attention of the majors, who saw Cave In given the "emo-metal Radiohead" tag enough times to aggressively pursue them, the band ultimately signing to Sony subsidiary RCA Records.

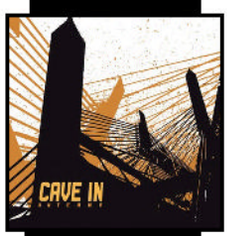
THE FACTS

RELEASED:
May 19, 2003

ALBUM:
Antenna

PERSONNEL:
Stephen Brodsky (vocals, guitar), JR Conners (drums), Adam McGrath (guitar), Caleb Scofield (bass)

HIGHEST CHART POSITION:
53 (UK)



"We saw it as an appealing opportunity to vastly expand Cave In's audience and also possibly earn a humble living off our band without working nine-to-five-day jobs," rhythm guitarist Adam McGrath tells *Hammer*. "At that time, none of us had anything we loved more or had worked harder for than Cave In. We were all ready to put our complete effort, time and energy into the band to take it as far as it would go."

Spirits were high when Cave In set out for Cello Studios in Los Angeles to record their major label debut in 2002. But ever the punk rock band, they were also naturally distrustful of the company they now kept.

"We of course wanted the record to do well, but we were well aware of the potential pitfalls of being in the major label world," drummer and vocalist JR Conners says. "It felt like the whole thing could be derailed at any moment. I remember us all trying to take the experience for what it was worth and focusing on making the record as best as we could."

Easier said than done. Some members of the band were so acutely aware of the pressure of meeting label expectations that it actually began to take its toll on certain creative choices they were making as their new album, *Antenna*, took shape.

"Before writing *Antenna*, it seemed like there was always something in the way of our creative process: line-up changes, school, shit jobs, the band being spread out…" says vocalist and guitarist Steven Brodsky.

"Signing to a major label kicked it all into overdrive. I was equally thrilled and nervous about the opportunity to focus solely on writing a Cave In album. I was confident in our abilities as a group, but the scenario both challenged and messed with my self-confidence. I knew the band had potential to reach a new audience – I just couldn't picture what it looked like. Consequently, some creative decisions were made that catered to an invisible mass of people, which sounds delusional, I know! Those are the moments when I was lost in the excitement of an unknown thing, for better or worse."

Cave In may still have had a mindset of an underground punk band, but sonically *Antenna* was pulling from far more mainstream sounds. The influence of one huge, then-recent crossover success story lead to the creation of the album's lead single, *Anchor*.

"The musical spirit of *Anchor* probably comes from being hyped on later-era Kyuss and early QOTSA," Steven tells us. "The opening riff has the same downstroke eighth-note thing that happens in songs like *Regular John* and *Avon* from the first [QOTSA] album, which we loved."

PRESS

Cave In (left to right): Caleb Scofield, Adam McGrath, Stephen Brodsky, JR Conners

After a six-month period – a then-unthinkable amount of time for a band who had recorded *Jupiter* in just four days – *Antenna* was complete. It was now time to show the record to their new paymasters, who were very receptive to one song in particular.

"Our A&R rep constantly said we needed a song like Soundgarden's *Black Hole Sun* and he felt *Anchor* was that song," says Adam. "He thought that *Anchor* would be the best way to introduce Cave In to a national radio audience, but I know we all felt there were better songs and singles on the record."

Reservations aside, the band made their first ever video for the song. It was a simple but brilliant premise: a businessman wakes up to find his feet encased in concrete and we see his struggles as has to go about his day weighed down by the blocks.

"That was director Dean Karr's idea and his interpretation of the song – I think it's well done," Steven smiles. "The fact that Dean got (actor and original Sonic Youth drummer) Richard Edson to play the lead role is huge. I remember arriving at the site where we did the band performance shot and feeling stunned by the production level; how much money was being spent, the number of people involved, having a make-up artist on site, that sort of thing. It was our first time making a music video, when just two years prior, we were recording *Jupiter* on a shoestring budget and surviving on Morning Star Chik Patties cooked in the studio microwave."

"IT FELT LIKE THE WHOLE THING COULD BE DERAILED AT ANY MOMENT"
JR CONNERS

Antenna was released on March 18, 2003, with *Anchor* following as a single two months later on May 19. Reviews for both the album and the song were glowing and it became the first Cave In album to chart in both the US and the UK, reaching No.169 in the former and 67 in the latter. *Anchor*, with its driving riff, machine-gun drumming and gorgeous Beatles-esque harmony in the chorus, had everything to make it one the era's definitive rock anthems. Unfortunately, it didn't quite work out like that.

"When it dropped it barely had a lukewarm response," Adam sighs. "There were certainly cries of 'sell-out' and people wondering how watered down we had become. I hoped we would have better luck with other singles down the line, but we really never made it that far. Excitement from the label dwindled after the first single dropped and our A&R rep left RCA shortly after *Antenna*'s release. All these events left Cave In rudderless in the major label machine."

But there were high points, at least. In 2003, Cave In hit the road on the

Cave In delivered a cult classic with *Anchor*

"WE NEEDED A SONG LIKE *BLACK HOLE SUN* AND *ANCHOR* WAS THAT SONG"

ADAM McGRATH

massive touring Lollapalooza that year, before opening for Muse and Foo Fighters, the European run with the Foos proving a particular highlight.

"When I think back about those trips, what I remember most was how great the band and their crew treated us," says JR "It felt like we were part of the family, so to speak. We had great conversations and we learned a great deal watching their whole operation every night. Some of the best moments in the *Antenna* era came from those trips."

After those tours, it became clear to both the band and the label that the relationship wasn't a beneficial one for either party, and Cave In and RCA mutually cut ties. Cave In decided to revisit their more metal sound, 2005's superbly brutal *Perfect Pitch Black* written as something of a backlash to the *Antenna* sound.

"The best thing to come out of [everything that happened] is *Perfect Pitch Black*," Steven says defiantly. "In the wake of *Antenna*, I feel fortunate that we found the strength to stay together and make that statement. You're not wrong in thinking it's an angry record, but Cave In was an angry band from the start, and maybe we just came full circle."

It's a sentiment that the band seem to stand by all these years down the line.

"I can't say I have strong feelings positive or negative about *Anchor*," Adam says. "I got to experience crazy adventures and travel the world by signing up to a major label. I think *Anchor* is a fine Cave In song for what it is."

The experience may have burned the members of Cave In too much for *Anchor* to be one of their personal favourite songs, but it still stands as a breakout anthem from a band who had previously toiled as underground darlings. For those who knew nothing of post-hardcore from the Boston underground at the start of the millennium, *Anchor* was the perfect introduction. It might not quite have been the crossover smash it certainly deserved to be, but to many it is a cult classic from a wildly different and brilliant time.

CAVE IN PLAY ARCTANGENT IN AUGUST

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YOUR SHOUT

FLOOR JANSEN CAN SING THE PHONE BOOK

…and other bold claims, complaints and cheerful words of support you had to offer on our massive Nightwish cover, In Flames comeback and more

Floor Jansen: oodles of talent

PRESS/LAURA ZALENGA

THE NUTSACKER

Tommy Lee's groundhog saw its shadow and now we get six more weeks of winter.
Chad McBride, Facebook

Barely into the New Year, and Tommy Lee is still as NSFW as ever. Still, what else would you expect from the drummer of Mötley Crüe?

FEEDING THE FLAMES

Thought we'd long lost In Flames to apathy. It's good hearing them sound hungry again.
Scott AA Wilson, Twitter

It's great to have In Flames back on such, er, incendiary form with *Foregone*, that's for sure, Scott! From our chat with frontman Anders Fridén, it sounds like the band are back creating what they love most – top-quality melodeath bangers.

GOT THE LIFE

Loved the Korn feature in issue 370. 1996 was such an interesting point in time for Korn as a band, and you can tell Jonathan Davis was really struggling to get on the right track – the stuff about him worrying about dying from drinking was particularly hard hitting. Thank God he made it through and has been inspiring so many of us since.
Carole Edwards, email

Absolutely, Carole – Jonathan Davis is a treasure for our scene and we can't even begin to fathom the number of lives he's positively impacted.

FLOOR FILLER

Floor can literally sing the phone book if she wants to I wasn't real big on *Human. :II: Nature.*, but *Endless Forms Most Beautiful* was amazing. I'm looking forward to the next album.
Adam Levenstein, Facebook

Yep, there's no refuting Floor's incredible talent, Adam, and her new solo album is a corker!

A SIGH FOR THE TIMES

Nightwish is an example of a band that can do anything they want and succeed, as creative freedom is a huge part of their catalogue. I think they could even release a nu metal song with a guest appearance from Mike Shinoda and still pull it off.
Michael Stepanian, Facebook

You say that like it'd be a bad thing, Michael! Honestly, we'd love to hear Nightwish go nu metal, even if it was only for a quick single. And Mike Shinoda certainly knows his way around some grand compositions.

WISHMASTER

@NightwishBand and @dannyelfman in one issue!
Fairie_the, Twitter

Yep, you're right – we spoil you. But hey, you deserve it.

ULRICHY RICH

Taipei Houston are the best band from the Metalli-kids. I think they will go furthest due to being a little more unique.
Merrick Lotz, Facebook

They're certainly setting their sights high, Merrick – and we all

#TWEETS

Trivium with three guitarists? Yes please!
Matthew Kiichi Heafy (@matthewkheafy)

I've received nothing but Love and Positivity after the Grammy 50 yr HipHop tribute. It's truly appreciated
Ice T, Body Count (@FINALLEVEL)

Wasting Light is the best Foo Fighters record, and I don't believe that's a controversial take
Brady Deeprose, Conjurer (@BradyConjurer)

Fair warning to ALL! I'm opinionated, caffeinated and now definitely agitated!
Paul Stanley, Kiss (@PaulStanleyLive)

Writing riffs is so long I get why you all eventually give up and become shoegaze bands
Ithaca (@ITHACABAND)

Babymetal: Only the Fox God k– ah, just turn to p.46

know you should expect greatness from an Ulrich.

NO FOX GIVEN

WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON WITH BABYMETAL? Those shows have sent me into a tailspin of conspiracy theories – I need to know!
Yui Kaonashi, email

The stock phrase we'd offer is "only the Fox God knows…" but that's not true this time, is it? You'll just need to read our Babymetal cover feature to find out!

KISS DISS

Kerry King really is on an ass-kissing mission lately. Is he hoping to pick up some touring with Metallica or Megadeth?
John Gagusauskas, Facebook

Let's face it, John, a lot of time has been dedicated to Kerry's distaste for bands and genres over the years, so it's easy to forget that he remains an incredibly passionate music fan – and we're here for hearing him salute the icons he loves.

THE BIG DEBATE

Pantera's controversial reunion hit its first major roadblock last month as the band were removed from the bills of German festivals Rock Am Ring and Rock Im Park

THEY SAID

"In the last few weeks, we have had many intensive conversations with artists, our partners and you, the festival fans. We have continued to deal with the criticism together and decided to remove [Pantera] from the program."

YOU SAY

It isn't Pantera anyway.
Michael Imhof, Facebook

Maybe they'll be replaced with other 'tribute' bands like AC/DC, Def Leppard, GN'R…
Kyle McMath, Facebook

Ridiculous. And only the fans lose in this situation.
Dave Darlington, Facebook

I'm sure Limp Bizkit and Machine Gun Kelly will pick up the slack.
Rocco Benigno, Facebook

I respect the decision but why did they schedule Pantera then? It makes no sense.
S93eve, Twitter

One can't expect everyone to be on board with these Pantera shows, but if you don't like, simply don't attend.
Wade Hill, Facebook

Pantera are only good when you're between 12-16. Listening to them past those ages is as cringe as being a brony.
Brandon Nichols, Facebook

JOIN THE BIG DEBATE AT FACEBOOK.COM/GROUPS/METALHAMMERREADERS

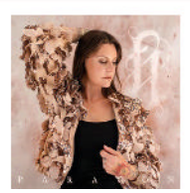
HAMMER STEREO

What's been blowing our office speakers

BABYMETAL
The Other One
"A glorious and welcome return. Praise be to the Fox God!"
ELEANOR GOODMAN
EDITOR

LANA DEL RABIES
Strega Beata
"An enthralling, industrial-driven deep dive into the psychological shadow realms"
JONATHAN SELZER
REVIEWS EDITOR

NAUT
Hunt
"*closes eyes, flails arms, prances around lounge* This makes my dark little soul very happy"
VANESSA THORPE
PRODUCTION EDITOR



FLOOR JANSEN
Paragon
"Perfect Sunday afternoon listening"
LOUISE BROCK
ART EDITOR

VENOMOUS CONCEPT
The Good Ship Lollipop
"Hardcore punk goes off the deep-end thanks to ND genius Shane Embury"
RICH HOBSON
STAFF WRITER

OV SULFUR
The Burden Ov Faith
"First Lorna Shore, now this: deathcore will own 2023"
DAVE EVERLEY
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

PRESS

NEW NOISE

DEATH PILL

The Ukrainian hardcore punk trio fighting for a better world against a backdrop of sexism, war and uncertainty

WORDS: EMILY SWINGLE

REALITY CAN OFTEN be a bitter pill to swallow and Ukrainian hardcore punk trio Death Pill know this only too well. Formed in 2017, the group had steadily built a reputation in their hometown of Kyiv and were working on their debut album when Russia invaded their country in February 2022. The band's world was turned upside down; rather than continuing to produce their debut, their focus instead shifted to that of personal safety and survival.

As lead vocalist/guitarist Mariana Navrotskaya's face freezes onscreen, the Kyiv internet connection staggering, she nonetheless makes the reality of her situation crystal clear.

"When you read the news, you never think that it will be you. We woke up in a nightmare, and we must live in that nightmare."

"I often hear people say, 'Oh you're brothers, you have to live in peace.' I'm sorry, but it's bullshit," drummer Anastasiya Khomenko asserts. "Just imagine for a second that 'big brother' comes to your house, he rapes your wife, he kills your son, he skins your dog. He steals all your money and then destroys your entire house. What would you do? Would you punish him, or would you open up your arms and forgive him?"

As the sounds of air alarms and gunshots slowly became 'the norm', the trio were forced to disperse – Anastasiya fled to Spain, bassist Natalya Seryakova to Australia and Mariana decided to remain in Kyiv. But while the invasion physically divided the trio, production of their album continued. Understandably, trauma and stinging rage has intensified the band's feral take on hardcore punk.

"I was living 30km away from Bucha when there was a massacre," Anastasiya tells us. "Slowly, you get numb to these things… but sometimes I will wake up in the night from the nightmares."

With a desperate need for catharsis, to howl and scream their lungs raw, every track was remastered to capture their renewed pain. Written before the war, Death Pill's debut is as much about personal empowerment as it is about raging against societal ills. From the riot-grrrl-rousing *Miss Revolt*, to the ex-boyfriend-bashing of **РАСЦАРАПАЮ ЕБАЛО** (beautifully translated as 'Scratch Asshole'), to *It's A Joke*'s bitter discussion of victims of violence and abuse, the band stayed focused on the bigger picture even as the war up-ended their daily lives.

"The war doesn't make our other problems unimportant. *Everything* we go through is still important," Natalya emphasises.

"With our music, there are no flowers, no sunshine – just real life," Mariana explains.

Released on February 24, 2023 – a year to the day since Russia invaded Ukraine – every track of Death Pill's debut is a reflection of the band's irrepressible will. Tracks churn and rage as growling breakdowns clash with broiling basslines, Death Pill taking the proto-thrash sensibilities of hardcore punk pioneers Discharge and adding the spikiness and unfiltered fury of early black metal. In turn, their geographical separation has also intensified their desire to get out into the world.

"Moving to Europe has actually been very interesting; I have had situations where you can see people thinking 'Stop telling me about this, I can't handle it,'" Anastasiya explains. "I know that people may never understand – and I'm happy for them, I really am. Ukrainians – we're traumatised. But we need people to listen. Russia will not stop in Ukraine. They will destroy us and then go to Latvia, to Lithuania, and so on. Everyone is in danger."

While Death Pill believe it is their duty to speak up and share the realities of war with the world, they don't want that to define them as a band, or as individuals.

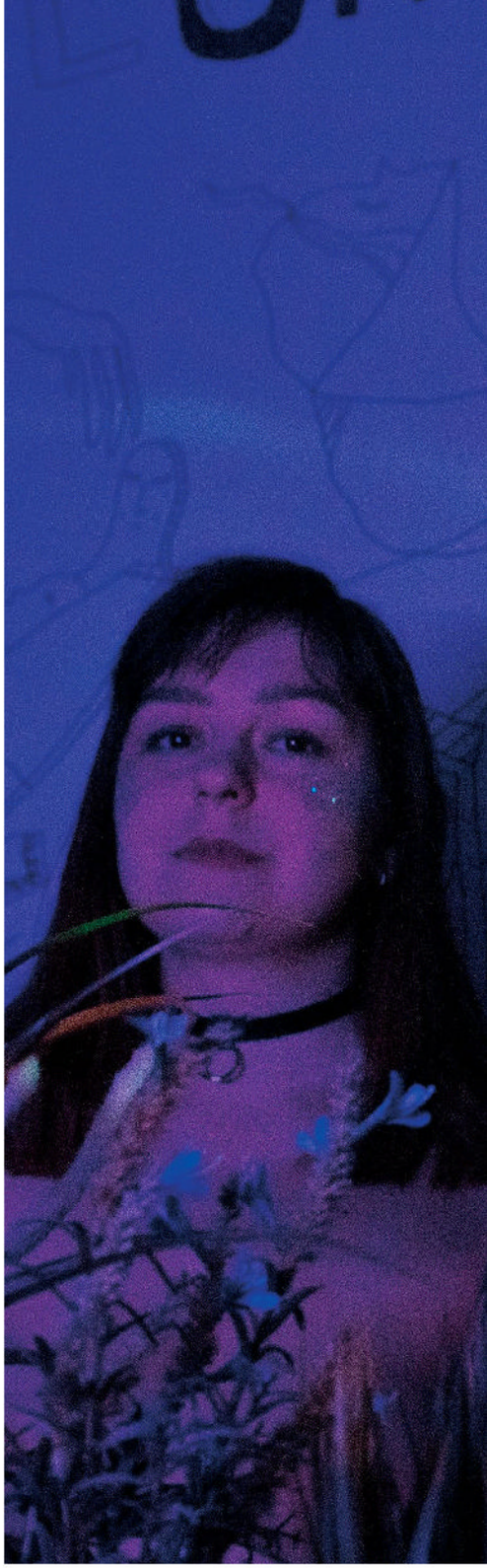
As Natalya puts it, "Why should war be the most important thing that's happened with us? Sometimes, it can be exhausting," she reflects. "Every time

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Hardcore punk if it was crushed in a snarling chokehold

FOR FANS OF: Scowl, Bikini Kill, Zulu

LISTEN TO: *Die For Vietnam*



PRESS/TEMENTIY PRONOV

Natalya Seryakova, Anastasiya Khomenko and Mariana Navrotskaya won't be defined by the invasion of their homeland

I buy something in a supermarket, I get asked, 'Where is your accent from?' and when I say Ukraine, they can't stop apologising. 'Oh, I'm so sorry. So sorry…' They don't know what to say. The conversation just stops. And it's like, 'Just give me my fucking bread!'"

This brazen, brutal candidness is what Death Pill are all about. While this may ruffle a few feathers, that's pretty much exactly what the trio want, their riling, outspoken 'riot grrrl' ethos standing loud and proud against anyone who'd try to deny them agency.

"Every crowd will have one person who doesn't like what we have to say… and it just makes us want to play even louder," Natalya says with a laugh.

"THE WAR DOESN'T MAKE OUR OTHER PROBLEMS UNIMPORTANT"

NATALYA SERYAKOVA

It's an admirable goal, but one the band have often fought for alone. Mariana reveals that before Death Pill's formation, there weren't many other all-female groups they could look up to, particularly in their home scene of Kyiv. In turn, they really feel like their presence in the scene has helped inspire other women to form bands.

"We wanted to show the world that being a woman doesn't stop you from making heavy, heavy music," Anastasiya says.

War may have changed the trio forever, but they won't let it control their lives or stop them doing what they love: making heavy music and inspiring other women to do the same.

"We are not who we were before; we will have this trauma for our whole lives. But we will handle it," Anastasiya says. "Because we are strong."

***DEATH PILL* IS OUT NOW VIA NEW HEAVY SOUNDS**

NEW NOISE

SPIDER GOD

Black metal meets true crime, Ingmar Bergman and… Justin Bieber?

WORDS: ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

SPIDER GOD'S FRONTMAN, G, has fingered many pies: hardcore bands, comfy-synth (Google it), and Ghost-inspired rock opera. But last year, Spider God broke Bandcamp with a black metal album covering Justin Bieber and Whitney Houston.

"I'd be lying if I said I didn't know it might rile people up," he says. "But we honestly thought it would be pretty low-key!"

Formed during the 2020 lockdown, G's one-man project – now a full band – grew legs in the online-by-necessity UK underground.

"It's a scene built on Instagram," he tells us. "That sounds awful, but it brings people together. A few key labels like Phantom Lure, Repose and Death Prayer shaped this quite disparate scene. Charlie [Woolley] at [London record shop] Crypt Of The Wizard became another big player, by giving us distribution."

Spider God pumped out four splits, three Ingmar Bergman-themed EPs, the aforementioned covers album, a companion EP, and finally, their debut album proper: *Fly In The Trap*. During pre-orders, it was Bandcamp's second-most popular metal release.

Spurred on by his love for concept records, G modelled *Fly In The Trap* on the story of Elisa Lam, the tourist whose death at LA's Cecil Hotel in 2013 remains an unsolved mystery.

"She was supposed to be in the audience for *Conan* [O'Brien] the week she was there," explains G. "I downloaded the episodes and searched the crowd. I was freaking myself out. To look for footage of a dead girl, just before she died – it started to get a bit unnerving."

G assembled a web of characters – sleuths, police officers, a fictional version of himself – to tell the story, but ultimately drew a line between fantasy and reality.

"The only way to stop obsessing about these cases is to leave," he says. "The last song, *Invisible Light*, feels uplifting because there's closure in walking away from something and living your life when other people can't anymore."

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Hyper-melodic, major-key black metal with a hardcore edge

FOR FANS OF: Véhémence, Lamp Of Murmuur, Spectral Wound

LISTEN TO: *A Thousand Lonely Spiders*

***FLY IN THE TRAP* IS OUT NOW VIA REPOSE**

NAUT

Bristolian post-punks bring back Bauhaus and the Banshees

WORDS: CATHERINE MORRIS • PICTURES: PAUL CRITCHLEY

BRISTOLIAN GOTHIC POST-PUNKS Naut are clawing their way out of the darkness with debut record *Hunt*, a heady mix of jagged guitars and pulsating drum machines that makes a reverential nod to the likes of Bauhaus, Siouxsie And The Banshees and The Sisters Of Mercy – "like you've cut a slice out of what was happening in 1983," explains frontman Gavin Laubscher.

Along with guitarist Jack Welch, Gavin started Naut out of a desire to see a harder edge to the post-punk revival, akin to the rawness of the 70s and 80s. Though with a background in black and death metal, plus myriad other influences, the pair were keen not to sound contrived, and Gavin describes their music as "almost anti-riffs mixed in with proper banger riffs". The song *Damocles*, intended to sound like Fields Of The Nephilim, ended up as "a kind of homage to Depeche Mode", he laughs.

The search for the Naut sound is encapsulated in the themes of *Hunt*. Using the imagery of the 'Wild Hunt' from Germanic folklore – a supernatural figure leading a ghostly group of hunters – Gavin explains that "it's about pulling something out of the ether to make it real".

Having played shows with the likes of King Dude and Grave Pleasures, the next thing they're manifesting is a UK tour, hopefully in the spring. "I think we really deliver the goods live," asserts Gavin, "Like Bauhaus in the 80s, we absolutely go for it!"

Time to dust off those dancing shoes and get those bones shaking.

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE: Angular post-punk meets big choruses, with a danceable heartbeat

FOR FANS OF: Grave Pleasures, Drab Majesty, Killing Joke

LISTEN TO: *Dissent*

***HUNT* IS OUT NOW VIA SEASON OF MIST**

ALL PRESS

ERASE THEORY

Former Letlive guitarist finds a nu lease of life

WORDS: REMFRY DEDMAN • PICTURES: GUTHRIE MELCHIADE

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
A contemporary blend of melodic rock and expansive electronica

FOR FANS OF:
Linkin Park, AFI, Letlive

LISTEN TO:
Lost It

WHEN BELOVED CALI soul-punks Letlive split in 2017, fans were distraught. But none were as upset as guitarist Jeff Sahyoun, who was thrust into a crisis of identity and confidence.

"I was writing some of the worst tracks of my life," Jeff says. "I didn't know who I was; I'd been onstage since I was 14 years old. I was trying to hold on to a lifestyle that I had been so used to since I was a child, when in reality, that chapter was closed."

Jeff's situation became desperate. Facing homelessness, he crashed on his sister's couch and attempted to rebuild his life. Now, with a couple of years between his lowest ebb and the present day, Jeff proudly shows *Metal Hammer* the last dollar he had to his name, which he dated to mark rock bottom, as a promise to himself that things would improve. His new band, Erase Theory, is vindication for that optimism. Their self-titled debut EP is an eclectic mix of danceable electro beats and melodic choruses, designed to purge emotion and help him rediscover the love he had for music before it became his full-time concern.

"We all use music for different reasons, whether that's for healing, entertainment, anger, love – it's our global language," Jeff says. "Writing this music was a way for me to get through the things that I was going through. When I play music now, I feel like I'm 15 years old, because it doesn't matter how many shirts I sell!""

***ERASE THEORY* IS OUT NOW VIA ICONS CREATING EVIL ART**

HOST

Yorkshire's godfathers of gloom revisit the guilty pleasures of their youth

WORDS: WILL MARSHALL

IN SHORT

SOUNDS LIKE:
Miserablism that's tailor-made for dancing

FOR FANS OF:
Paradise Lost, Carpenter Brut, Perturbator

LISTEN TO:
Wretched Soul

"NOBODY ASKED FOR this!" is Greg Mackintosh's open, if perhaps inaccurate, assessment of Host. His new project with Paradise Lost bandmate Nick Holmes is a spiritual successor to the band's 1999 album of the same name, and a love letter to the Yorkshire alternative clubs where their love of metal, new wave and gothic music blossomed.

"It's taking stock of yourself and your life," Greg explains. "The project sprung up because when we were growing up, liking this stuff together was frowned on. But we're allowed to completely air these skeletons in public now."

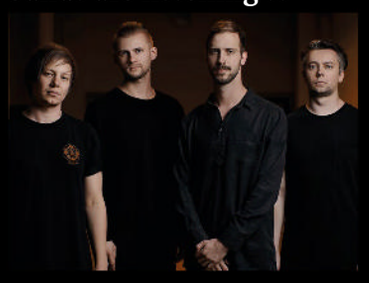
Host's debut album, *IX*, embraces those formative influences. In *Wretched Soul*, synths pulse under Nick's quietly damning voice, while *Tomorrow's Sky* brims with goth club nostalgia. *Hiding From Tomorrow*, meanwhile, hints at arena rock.

"When new wave was in the charts, stuff like Gary Numan and Duran Duran represented commerciality, but were still very dark," Greg says. "We're not trying to recapture anything, as such – it's looking back fondly on our past and reinterpreting it."

***IX* IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST**

IN THE KNOW

What your favourite bands are listening to

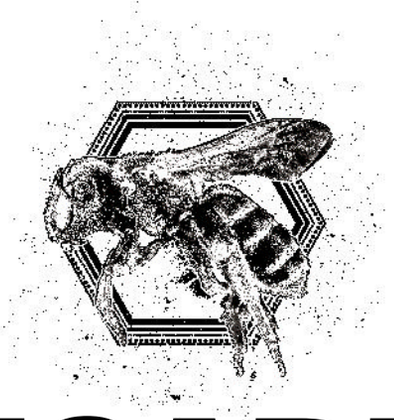


ANNISOKAY

"ANNISOKAY AREN'T THAT well known outside Germany, but they deserve a lot of exposure. I love how emotional their vocals are, but they're still so heavy. That band should be playing to huge crowds – their singer is a real mastermind."

SHARON DEN ADEL, WITHIN TEMPTATION

ALL PRESS. ANNISOKAY: PRESS/BENJAMIN POHLE. SHARON DEN ADEL: PRESS/TIM TRONCKOE



HOARD ALMIGHTY

Box sets, underground oddities and all the essential merch you need this month

WARDRUNA

RUNALJOD TRILOGY - VINYL BOX SET

BY NORSE MUSIC

£167.90

FIFTEEN YEARS IN the making, Wardruna's *Runaljod* trilogy isn't so much a concept as a lived experience – a work of singular dedication that's transformed both the musical landscape and the consciousness of countless fans for whom the band have become a calling. The three albums – *Gap Var Ginnunga, Yggdrasil* and *Ragnarok* – each musically bound to their respective themes of seed-sowing, nurture and rebirth – may have been collected before as a CD set, but this vinyl edition is undoubtedly the lodestone. Limited to a mere 1,000 copies, it comes in a lidded, leather-finish box imprinted with hot foil, featuring each album in double gatefold with a tactile matt finish, new UV-varnished inner sleeves and the vinyl itself in a range of new colours. You'll also find a 72-page lyric book, in English and the original Norse, featuring exclusive photos, as well as a Wardruna logo slipmat, to help you further contemplate the cycle of life.

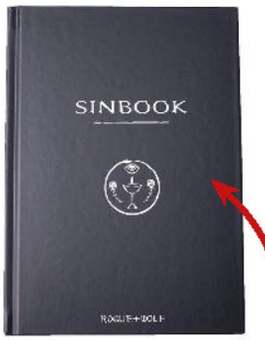
wardrunashop.com

IRON MAIDEN BRACELET

£175

Hewn from Steve Harris's bass strings, this Eddie-emblazoned bracelet forms part of a unique jewellery range that uses artists' snapped strings and blunted plectrums. Plus, all profits go to the excellent Heavy Metal Truants kids' charity.

tinyurl.com/maiden-bracelet



SINBOOK NOTEBOOK

£8.99

Designed to capture your lamentations and honour the unsung joys that haphazardly cross your path, this über-goth notebook is the perfect receptacle for your darkest musings. Or you could just scribble band logos all over it.

tinyurl.com/sin-book

FLOOR JANSEN BOX SET

£134

This kitchen-sink-and-washing-machine-too box set of Floor Jansen's debut solo record, *Paragon*, will surely keep her fans happy. Digipak CD, fan-edition 180-gram vinyl, tote bag, pin badge, signed print, slipmat, hardcover book? More like Floor YES, son.

tinyurl.com/floor-box

BEYOND THE BLACK BOX SET
£79.99

Steep yourself in the glory and bombast of Beyond The Black's latest outpouring with this opulent box set. Additional goodies include art prints, two CDs and a bonus EP pressed onto regal gold wax. Beeindruckend!

tinyurl.com/beyond-box

NE OBLIVISCARIS FLAG
£20.52

Returning with their first album since 2017, there's sure to be some banner-waving to celebrate the return of these proggy Aussies. Turns out they have just the thing – a ruddy great flag emblazoned with *Exul*'s heraldic artwork.

tinyurl.com/exul-flag

PAWZUPH TRINKET BOX
£17.99

Think cats are cute? Funny? Charming? A source of hilarious viral content? ALL WRONG! They are forces of unbridled Satanic power and with this, uhhh, *trinket box*, someone is finally recognising their hideous demonic might.

tinyurl.com/devil-kitteh

SKULL BATH BOMBS
£3-£12.99

Turn bathtime into the closing scenes of *Poltergeist* with these grinning bath bombs. Scented with vanilla, raspberry and black oud, they promise to make your daily ablutions a delightful – if slightly unnerving – treat.

tinyurl.com/skull-bomb

PERIPHERY T-SHIRT
£19.99-20.99

Periphery's seventh album is called *Djent Is Not A Genre*. The joke's 10 years late – a meta comment on djent overall? Let's go with that. Sport this garm to prove you're on banter's bleeding edge.

tinyurl.com/periphery-tee

BEER COFFEE
£25.94

A depressant and a stimulant walk into a bar. Well, kinda. Old Town Spice Shop's locally roasted beans do a sterling job imitating such boozy pleasures as Scottish ale, black IPA and even chocolate stout.

tinyurl.com/beer-brew

OCTOPUS STEAMPUNK CLOCK
£27.99

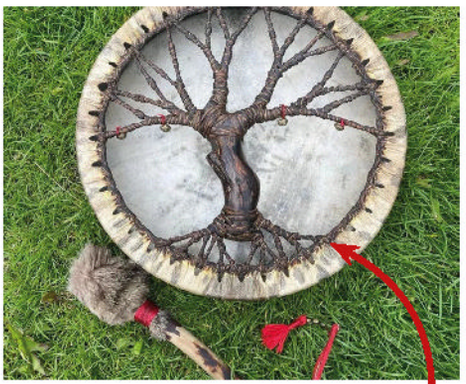
If you've rinsed Mastodon's *Leviathan* and Ahab's entire discography, take the plunge with this nautical numpty. Fully functional, handpainted and much more interesting than checking your wristwatch. This is hardcore, steampunk, writhing, slimy timekeeping.

tinyurl.com/octo-clock

THE LAST OF US T-SHIRT
£23.99

You've already cried, thrown up and cried more during *The Last Of Us*'s triumphant first series. Take that shit to the streets with this t-shirt, inflicting maximum emotional turmoil upon fellow humans. They deserve it.

tinyurl.com/firefly-tee



SHAMAN DRUMS
£30.69

Just in case Heilung hold open auditions, right? Cloven from suet leather and wood, this authentic, charming drum can withstand a worthy amount of banging. Probably not to Slipknot's *(sic)*, but certainly enough to impress your mates.

tinyurl.com/shaman-drum

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THE NORSE CODE

Sabaton have taken their own island. Well, *kinda*. As their mission to conquer Europe continues, we head to Gotland to find out what the hell is going on

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PHOTOGRAPHY: STEVE BRIGHT

Stand on Visby's rocky beach and gaze out across the roiling sea, and it's easy to imagine a fleet of wooden ships heaving into view over the horizon, bearing an army of snarling invaders ready to subjugate its inhabitants, or worse.

Dating from the Viking Age, this picture-postcard medieval town is the biggest settlement on the Swedish island of Gotland – a hunk of rock measuring 100 miles by 30 miles, located halfway between mainland Sweden to the west and Latvia to the east. Visby has been fought over down the centuries by the Swedes, the Danes, the Hanseatic League and more, and it has the ruined city walls to prove it.

Another army has invaded Gotland today. This one numbers just five people, and furs and armour have been replaced by puffer jackets and beanie hats to protect against the fearsome wind battering them. They've been standing with their backs to the waves for the last 15 minutes for a photoshoot, and the cold is getting to them. Sabaton may be the most successful Swedish metal band of the 21st century, but they clearly haven't inherited their ancestors' hardy genes.

"I think we've done enough," says the band's usually laidback bassist and Joint Chief Of Staff Pär Sundström tetchily. "We have a show to play."

A gig is fairly unusual in Gotland. In a few hours, Sabaton will play the local ice hockey arena, the fourth gig of a 20-date tour of some of Sweden's furthest-flung outposts. The last vaguely famous rock group to come to Visby were Swedish glam-metal C-listers Hardcore Superstar. That was in 2021. The next one is… well, there is no 'next one', beyond a few low-level Swedish bar acts.

"We called the people who ran the venue and said, 'We want to do a show'," says Pär, grumpiness gone. "They said, 'When?' and we said, 'February.' They said, 'Why would you want to be here in February? Nothing happens!'"

So why *do* you want to be here in February?

"Why not?" he says, with the grin of man who has made it this far without other people telling him how to do things, and isn't about to start listening to them now.

A 2,000-capacity ice hockey hall on a windswept Baltic island is a long way from the kind of places that Sabaton normally play these days. In April, they kick off a full European tour with four UK arena dates, featuring support from Babymetal and Finnish panto-metallers Lordi.

"We're only the third Swedish band to headline Wembley Arena, after Abba and Roxette," says singer Joakim Brodén proudly, as we sit in the lobby of the waterfront hotel that has been commandeered as a temporary barracks by the band and several of their 50-strong crew and entourage.

They arrived here yesterday via ferry from the Swedish mainland. This is a scaled-down operation by their standards: just the three articulated trucks and two tour buses carrying the band, their equipment and their stage set. The crew for their upcoming UK shows and the European arena tour that follows currently numbers 141, including drivers, caterers and the people who take care of the laundry.

Visby itself is a beautiful town. A cathedral whose origins date back to the 13th century looms over cobbled streets and charming old buildings. Crumbling fortifications and the ruins of churches offer glimpses of past glories and the fates that befell them. Still, the people who said that nothing happens in Visby in February weren't lying. Aside from the odd bar and restaurant, pretty much everything else is closed.

This the first time Joakim has been to the island, but Pär came here regularly as a teenager. Every summer, Visby holds one of the biggest medieval events in Europe, its population of 24,000 swelling to upwards of 100,000 for one epic week of fighting, jousting and drinking. The young Pär's interest in live action role-playing drew him to medieval re-enactment circles, which in turn brought him here as a teenager.

Neatly organised camouflage so it can be easily found (ho ho!)

"I came here for several years," he says, sitting on the tour bus a couple of hours before the show. "I didn't know anybody, I came over on the ferry on my own. There was so much going on. There were knights jousting in the moat next to the walls. It's a party island in the summer. I've spent more than a month of my life here, but I've never been sober before."

History and location aside, Visby is a typical stop-off on this tour. Eighty per cent of Sweden's population of 10 million lives in the lower third of a country that measures almost 1,000 miles from top to bottom but just 300 miles at its widest point. Most bands play Stockholm, Gothenburg, Malmö and maybe a couple of other medium-sized cities in the south and call it a tour.

This run of shows is the polar opposite of that. The idea was to bring the Sabaton show to people who might not otherwise be willing or able to travel see them. The first gig of this leg was in Övertorneå, a tiny town in the far north of the country on the border with Finland. The population of Övertorneå is 1,900, and 1,500 turned up to the gig. "Nothing has ever happened up there on that scale," says Pär. "It was lovely, we had the whole city backing us up."

This is actually the second leg of a similar, 30-date tour of off-the-beaten-track Swedish towns that Sabaton played in 2022. According to Pär, that original run was a direct response to being unable to tour internationally during the pandemic. They decided to do this second leg the day they played the final show of the first run.

"It was the best tour we've ever done," says the bassist, who lives in Cyprus for much of the year. "We did it after being locked in for so long. That last night was emotional, people were crying. I didn't want it to end."

By the time this second leg finishes, they'll have hit such second- and third-tier towns as Kiruna (pop. 20,000), Eskjö

Is it just us, or do Sabaton look odd in 'civilian' clothes?

"I'VE NEVER BEEN TO THIS ISLAND SOBER BEFORE"

PÄR SUNSTRÖM

(pop. 9,000) and Uddevalla (pop. 35,000). As the band's de facto manager, Pär took a hands-on approach, working with their booking agent on everything from routing the tour to booking the venues – something that keeps costs down, and also allows the band to retain control over what they do.

"It's a lot of work," he concedes. "But at the same time you get so much out of it. We've got no one telling us, 'No, you shouldn't play in this place or that place, you can't do this or that.' It's the way we've done things for our entire career."

Rock and metal bands can follow one of two career paths these days. The most familiar, and clichéd, path is to take the traditional swashbuckling approach, heavy on the sex'n'drugs'n'rock'n'roll, hoping charisma and the odd half-decent tune can magically translate into record sales, streams and YouTube views (spoiler: it rarely does).

The other is to recognise the music business for what it is – i.e. a business – and approach it accordingly. In Sabaton's case, this has meant everything from teaming up with videogame company World Of Tanks to launching a range of band-branded of underpants. This way of doing things may lack rock'n'roll's traditional pirate glamour but, as Sabaton have proved, it's far more likely to result in a successful and sustained career (in fairness, it does help that they write epic tunes with the kick of a howitzer too).

This tour is part of that approach. It's hard to think of any other band who would spent several weeks schlepping around the backwaters of Sweden, but then Sabaton seem to relish challenges – and Pär Sundström especially. Like Gene Simmons in camo trousers, the bassist has essentially willed his band to success.

The most unlikely thing about Sabaton's upcoming UK tour isn't that Babymetal are supporting Sabaton in the UK – there's a long-standing mutual respect there, with the Swedes supporting their Japanese counterparts in Tokyo in 2018 and Joakim appearing on Babymetal's 2019 song *Oh! MAJINAI*. No, the most unlikely thing is that Sabaton are headlining multiple arenas in Britain in the first place. The idea of a power metal band playing such large venues in the UK would have been unthinkable in 2006, when they first toured the country as unknown openers on a three-band bill featuring Edguy and headliners Dragonforce.

"I'd never heard of them before we played with them the first time," says Dragonforce guitarist Herman Li, talking to *Hammer* from his adopted home of LA via Zoom. "The UK media wanted nothing to do with the kind of music we both played, but I could see they had something about them."

Sabaton (left to right): Tommy Johansson, Pär Sundström, Chris Rörland, Hannes Van Dahl and Joakim Brodén (front)

'Through the gates of Hell, as we make our way to Heaven!'

Pär unleashes his inner Steve Harris

Sabaton were never Mötley Crüe, though they had fun on the road. They'd guzzle vodka and Red Bull then wonder why they couldn't get to sleep. "We were in party mode, going out every night after the show, trying to find an afterparty with the fans," says Pär.

There were moments of drunken foolishness, naturally, like the time Joakim and Pär crashed on a fan's couch after getting turned away from a party in a hotel after a gig in Glasgow. As if it wasn't bad enough waking up the next day to a row between the fan and his wife, who wanted to know who the hell these hairy Swedes were and why they were sleeping on her floor, they realised that their bus had left for the next gig in Inverness without them. Cue a wallet-emptying £280 cab ride to ensure they made the show on time.

For musicians as ambitious as Sabaton were even back then, that kind of behaviour simply wasn't sustainable. "There's nothing wrong with having a great party after every gig when you do 15 shows a year, but all of a sudden you find yourself doing 170 shows in 12 months, and it's not so smart anymore," explains Joakim. The tipping point for the singer came during a gig in the late 2000s. "I was super-hungover and I was puking between the songs," he says. "That was when I thought, 'No, I can't do this anymore.'"

"I WAS PUKING BETWEEN SONGS"

JOAKIM BRODÉN

Even before that, Joakim and Pär had realised that the old rock'n'roll clichés weren't conducive to a career in the increasingly tough post-Napster world of 2000s metal.

"Even on that first tour, Pär had a laptop," says Herman Li, whose band toured with Sabaton for a second time in 2009. "I was pretty much managing Dragonforce, and we'd both spend all our time looking for somewhere we could plug in and get online. No other musicians apart from us were doing that at that point."

Some things haven't changed. Anyone stepping into Sabaton's dressing room at the ICA Maxi Arena today will be greeted by the sight of five men tapping away on their laptops. No one is vomiting in the corner or falling face-first into a pile of drugs; instead guitarist Chris Rörland ▶

SABATON X BABYMETAL

Ahead of touring together in Europe, frontman Joakim and bassist Pär field BM's questions

Su-metal: Joakim, you collaborated with us on the song *Oh! MAJINAI* [meaning 'magic' or 'spell']. What kind of spell would you like to cast on someone or something?
Joakim: "As an old Street Fighter, I'm gonna have to go with Hadouken!"

Su-metal: In Babymetal, we have a supreme being named the Fox God. If you were to fight him, what kind of method would you use? Or would you try to get him alone?
Joakim: "I would never dare to fight the Fox God. So I'll go with the old saying: If you can't beat them, join them."

Su-metal: What is in the tank that always appears on stage with you?
Joakim: "We actually have two tanks, Audie and Walther, named after soldiers we sing about on our [2014] album *Heroes*. The inside of the tanks are not very exciting, I'm afraid, but we have heard rumours of our crew hiding in there and eating candy from time to time, so who knows?"

Moametal: What is your favourite food? Do you happen to like sweets? What do you eat that makes you so strong?
Pär: "My favourite food is Swedish tacos. Perhaps you can try them when we tour together, since we do our own catering! Swedish tacos are inspired by Tex Mex but have become Swedenized and even tastier. I cannot say if it makes anyone strong, but it makes me happy! When it comes to sweets I do enjoy them also – sometimes too much."

Su-metal: I once read somewhere that you are interested in Japanese history. Joakim, If you visited Japan again, where would you like to visit?
Joakim: "Yes, very much so. I'd love to go back to Kyoto – I was there in 2015 – since I felt there was so much more to discover. It's an amazing city, and one day I'll go back and spend some serious time there."

Moametal: Do you like Babymetal?
Pär: "I do! When we toured in Japan with you guys, I did not miss a single show!"

Moametal: What made you first decide to play metal music?
Pär: "I liked metal music since my neighbour introduced me to Iron Maiden and my parents got me a guitar, but it was not until a few years later I really decided that I wanted to play metal myself. A guy approached me in school, and said that because I have long hair, I should be in a band. We became best friends and formed the first band I was in, called Mercator."

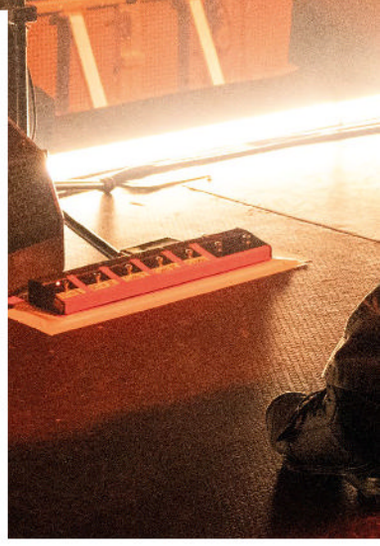
Su-metal: You have an amazing ability to really involve the audience at your live shows. How do you do it?
Joakim: "The audience is what makes it special for us every night, since we pretty much travel around with the same people, performing a similar set. The crowd in the hall is what is unique. But us playing the song *Primo Victoria* is a common occurrence!"

Moametal: My first impression of metal was scary and dangerous, but I've had the honour of meeting many legendary artists, including yourselves, and everyone is incredibly friendly. I consider you all as my uncles – is that OK?
Pär: "I think it is a lovely thought to become part of a big metal family, however we are also unfortunately aware that there are bad eggs everywhere. But generally heavy metal musicians and fans are quite good people. Just look at metal festivals and how little trouble there is there compared to festivals of some other genres."

Moametal: What Sabaton song would you recommend we listen to?
Pär: "It depends on your mood, but some songs that most people like are *The Attack Of The Dead Men*, *Dreadnought*, and also some older songs such as *To Hell And Back* and *Primo Victoria*!"

Pär loves it when a plan comes together

Joakim in a rare coat-wearing moment



is working on designs for new guitar picks. The vibe is less 'Bacchanalian rock'n'roll orgy', more 'slightly odd IT company who are a month behind on the office rent'.

Something stranger is happening a few doors down. Half a dozen people wearing assorted olde worlde costumes are sneaking into a small storage room. There's a woman dressed in a flowing peasant dress and a couple of guys in what look like handmade tunics. Someone else is in the regalia of a medieval Christian priest, replete with robes and crucifix. In the middle of them all is a man in a chair, having black warpaint applied to his face.

These are a bunch of local medieval re-enactors who have been roped in to spring a surprise on the support band, Hulkoff, by lining up behind them onstage and dancing at the conclusion of their set.

"It is a big deal that Sabaton are playing Visby," says one of the re-enactors. His name is Richard, and he's a big fan of the band. "It's weird that they've come here now, because no bands come here in the winter. But I'd say there are plenty of people here who will come to the gig who don't like metal but know Sabaton."

Much of Sabaton's popularity in their homeland stems from 2012's *Carolus Rex*, a concept album inspired by the 18th-century Swedish king Charles XII released in both English- and Swedish-language editions. The latter was novel enough to reach beyond the boundaries of the metal scene, ultimately ensuring a tour like this can happen now.

"In Sweden, there are enough people who aren't metalheads who would come to our shows, but I don't think there are too many countries like that," Joakim reasons. "Finland, maybe, but nowhere else. Not the UK."

Sabaton's high profile in their home country has its downsides. In January 2023, Swedish Sceptics Association, an organisation founded in the early 80s and dedicated to promoting the veracity of scientific research, announced that they were honouring Sabaton with their Enlightener Of The Year award in recognition of the band "[combining] its artistic work with public education" – a reference to the factual accuracy of their lyrics and videos.

Yet within days the organisation announced that the award was being "reviewed". It transpired that they had been made aware of an interview Pär had given after playing Crimea in 2015, in the wake of Russia's annexation of the Ukrainian peninsula. "If you go to [Crimean city] Sevastopol, you hardly feel they feel occupied," the bassist told *Sweden Rock* magazine in 2016, adding, "All these years they've felt like Russians but treated like a small piece of Ukraine."

Unsurprisingly given recent events, this unearthed quote caused a media furore, prompting Pär to issue a statement saying that his original quotes were referring to "how I experienced the situation there and then", adding, "That someone invades or occupies another country is against international law."

It was a clear response, but one that could have gone further in condemning Vladimir Putin's illegal occupation of the country. This may be coloured by the fact that Sabaton have a sizable Russian following. "Yeah, we have a lot of fans in Russia," says Pär now. "But we have a lot of fans in Ukraine too, and I can see from Spotify they are listening to our songs while their country is at war. I have friends on both sides, fans who are being called up to fight. A lot of fans [in Ukraine] have asked us to write about this battle."

And will you?

"Not now. It's a current event, we don't write about active politics. Maybe in the future, but now not now. It's extremely heavy."

The Swedish Sceptics Association completed their review and decided to stick to their original plan and give the band

The best February night out Visby has had in a long time!

their award. "When the media in Sweden write about Sabaton, they get shitloads of traffic," says Pär. "Five guys singing about war, wearing camouflage, it was the perfect thing to write about. It's a storm in a teacup."

Sabaton have a warehouse containing all their old stage props. This includes their very first stage set, a riser with ramps, pillars, ladders and room for drums and keyboards that they bought from a long-forgotten Swedish band and was used for three shows and the video for 2009's single *40:1*. "It looked huge when we got it," says Joakim. "Today, it's like, 'OK, not so big.'"

"UKRAINIAN FANS WANT US TO WRITE ABOUT THE WAR"

PÄR SUNDSTRÖM

Their most famous prop is the two-ton tank that's been used as a riser used by drummer Hannes Van Dahl since 2015. There are actually two tanks, nicknamed Walther and Audie – the former after German WWII General Walther Wenck, the latter after decorated US soldier-turned-Hollywood actor Audie Murphy, subjects of the Sabaton songs *Hearts Of Iron* and *To Hell And Back* respectively. Two tank risers may seem like overkill to some, but it enables the band to send one ahead to the next gig in classic military fashion.

The tank(s) will naturally be part of their upcoming arena shows, but Pär and Joakim are cagey about what else the gigs involve. The bassist dangles the words "theatrics" and "drama". "We want to bring in a bit of real acting," he says. "We want to bring in real humans to the show to illustrate the subjects of the songs a bit more."

There's no tank here in the ICA Maxi Arena and certainly no actors hamming it up, just museum-style figures dressed in the livery of Caroleans – 17th- and 18th-century Swedish soldiers – dotted between the pillars that circle the stage and Sabaton themselves. This is a scaled-down performance by Sabaton standards. "It doesn't make sense financially to bring all that stuff on this tour," says Joakim. "But we're giving people a different kind of Sabaton show."

The 2,000-odd Gotlanders here tonight don't seem to miss the heavy ordnance onstage. The arrival of a band whose last four albums all reached No.1 in the Swedish charts is a big deal. "The last band I saw play here was Europe about 10 years ago," an audience member named Anna tells *Hammer*. Her sparkly high street top and high-heeled boots would put her in a very small minority at a regular Sabaton gig, but the crowd here is split 60-40 between people who look like metal fans and people who don't. "I knew the name

Another town conquered!

Visby faces *The Attack Of The Dead Men*

Sabaton, but I'm not that familiar with their music. He likes them, though," she adds, gesturing to her boyfriend, whose Sabaton-branded tricorn hat suggests he's very much in the metal-loving 60% of this audience.

The presentation may be stripped down, but anthems such as *The Lion From The North*, *The Red Baron* and *Bismarck* remain as brilliant and bombastic as always, even if half a dozen songs and all of Joakim's between-song banter is delivered in Swedish and goes over our heads. Still, their gig, their rules.

An hour after the show, the arena has emptied and Sabaton's crew are packing up their gear. The band themselves are in various states of undress backstage, the prospect of a 6am alarm call to catch the ferry back to the mainland hanging over them. There are three more weeks of this tour left before it winds up in the city of Lund, a bustling metropolis of 90,000 people. "And then there'll be no more places left for us to play in Sweden," booms Joakim, only half joking.

"WE COULD COLLABORATE WITH BABYMETAL"

PÄR SUNDSTRÖM

And after that? There's one more standalone single scheduled around the UK tour in April (Joakim and Pär refuse to say what it's called, though the singer says it will "surprise people"), plus a movie (they're equally tight-lipped about details for this). The follow-up to 2109's *The Great War* and its 2022 companion, *The War To End All Wars*, is a way off yet, but it's unlikely to complete a World War I-themed trilogy of albums. "I'd be surprised if we never touched WWI again, but I'd also be very surprised if our next album was another WWI album," says Joakim.

And what of a potential collaboration with their soon-to-be touring partners Babymetal? It's a rare moment where Joakim and Pär don't present a united front. "Musically, it would be hard because of what we do and what they do," says Joakim.

"It can be done, definitely," counters his bandmate, "we just need to find the right time."

All of that's in the future. Gotland has been taken, but there are more far-flung towns to conquer, more audiences to pound into submission, and anyway, those tanks won't roll themselves out of storage. It's all quiet on the Baltic front right now, but that peace won't last.

SABATON'S UK TOUR WITH BABYMETAL BEGINS IN LEEDS ON APRIL 14. *HEROES OF THE GREAT WAR*, THE SECOND IN A TRILOGY OF EPs, IS OUT NOW VIA NUCLEAR BLAST

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INTO THE METALVERSE

Babymetal are back with a wild new concept album. But what does it all mean? And are we getting a third member? We flew to Tokyo for answers

WORDS: ELEANOR GOODMAN • INTERVIEW TRANSLATION: TYLER MARIKO MCABEE
ART DIRECTION & DESIGN: YODAMETAL (ROKUSHIKI) • DESIGN: RINOMETAL (ROKUSHIKI) • PHOTOGRAPHY: SUSUMETAL (PROGRESS-M)

Clap-clap, clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap-clap, "Yon yon!" Clap-clap, clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap-clap, "Yon yon!" The chant fills the thick air of the windowless, wood-panelled restaurant as 130 Babymetal fans at an aftershow party raise their glasses and cheer. Some have painted their faces white like Babymetal's backing musicians, the Kami Band, and many sport official merch or custom t-shirts. All are ecstatic.

Metal Hammer are in Chiba prefecture, 30 miles east of Tokyo. It's Sunday January 29, 2023 and we've just witnessed the second of two consecutive Babymetal shows at the Makuhari Messe convention centre in the company of 15,000 other fans. As with every Babymetal gig we've seen, they were loud, colourful and unlike anything else out there.

Yet until recently, there was no certainty that a Babymetal performance, or a party like this, would ever happen again. On October 10, 2021 (10/10/2021), following a 10-date series of shows to celebrate 10 years of Babymetal, a mysterious announcement online proclaimed the band had been 'sealed'. No one knew when or whether they'd return.

Then, exactly a year and a day later, there was another announcement: 'the seal would finally be lifted' with a 'two-day performance' called Babymetal Returns – The Other One. A concept album, also called *The Other One*, would follow.

Back at the gathering, superfan Susumu – more on him later – says he felt conflicted about the news. "I had a mixture of anxiety and anticipation," he remembers. "Is the Kami Band alive and well? Could they possibly become virtual or a backing track? But on the other hand, I was hopeful that I would be able to see their amazing performance again and experience Babymetal live with my whole body."

Later, Babymetal co-vocalist Moametal will explain the reasons behind the duo's hiatus to *Metal Hammer*. "It's been 10 years of purely pushing forward and not looking back in order to achieve Metal Resistance," she will say. "Taking a breather allowed me to take a step back and really appreciate how much love I have for Babymetal. So, I truly hope our fans understand that being sealed was an essential time for us."

Still, other questions remain: What's the story behind their new album? Will they ever bring in a permanent third member to replace the much-missed Yui, who departed in 2018? And what does their future hold? We've come to Tokyo for answers.

Twenty-four hours earlier, we arrive at concrete behemoth Makuhari Messe for show one. In the foyer is a monument bearing the handprints of the wrestling and fencing athletes who won gold medals here during the Tokyo 2020 Olympics.

With his pink hair, matching pink t-shirt emblazoned with the words 'Funky Metal Babys' and oversized yellow glasses, Babymetal fan Kenji resembles 90s UK personality Timmy Mallet. He's been to more than 20 Babymetal shows. But for his Sanrio rabbit puppet My Melody, it's the first one. Near some lockers, a posse dressed like the Kami Band amasses, in full facepaint and white robes.

By a bank of vending machines, we get talking to Uyu-metal, who's wearing cute black satin bows in her hair and sings in tribute band Dizzymetal, which formed in 2015. Why the name Dizzymetal? "We love alcohol! Good songs and drinks make us dizzy!" She laughs and waves her arms around her head, to illustrate her point. What does she think will happen tonight? "A big bang! Ha ha ha! Moametal, Su-metal… big bang!"

Moametal raises her staff at the start of Babymetal's stunning show

PRESS/TAKU FUJII

"TEN PARALLEL WORLDS WERE DISCOVERED"

SU-METAL

At the guestlist desk, we're handed a grey and black 'Savior Mask' to slip over our plain one. Currently in Japan, masks must be worn when you're within two metres of someone else, even outside. The good news is that, just yesterday, the government lifted restrictions on concerts, meaning people are now allowed to shout loudly.

An usher hurries us to our seat, and we watch messages loop on the big screens in each corner of the room. They include: 'Please wear your Savior Mask at all times', 'No smart phones' and 'No banners' – each accompanied by a cute skeleton illustration. The most entertaining ones are 'No other nuisances', alongside an image of two side-by-side skeletons getting clonked on the head by a crowd surfer, and 'No big head costumes', showing a skeleton wearing an oversized Fox God head.

At 6.10pm, the lights go out. A video message plays, accompanied by a voiceover: "The time has come for us to unify our voices once again," it declares. "The Fox Gate is where a new journey begins."

Ten figures robed in black march slowly down a central aisle, bathed in blue light, to the suspenseful intro of *Metal Kingdom* – the first track on *The Other One*. Each bears a golden staff that looks like an upside-down pair of scissors, two large Os sticking out the top to represent the album title. At the head of the aisle, lights illuminate two enormous, stone-grey doors with fox heads carved into them, eyes glowing red. The doors part, and a platform wreathed in dry ice slides out to reveal three ornate thrones: Su-metal sits in the middle, Moametal is to her left… and the other throne is empty.

Su-metal wants to collab with Rammstein. Make it happen, Fox God!

Moametal says the band needed to go on hiatus to recharge their batteries

Moametal walks down the aisle while Su-metal starts to sing, and then she turns to face her bandmate. They end up on either side of a round stage in the middle of the walkway, sweeping and raising intricate tridents, before stepping forwards. Their podium rises. Firework showers detonate along the length of the gangway, causing a ripple of awe. Uyu-metal was right!

Since Yui left the band, Su and Moa have appeared with one of a revolving cast of dancers, dubbed 'The Avengers'. This time they're joined by Momoko, formerly of Babymetal's previous band, Sakura Gakuin. The trio run through *Divine Attack - Shingeki – The Other One*'s second song – on the round stage, which by this point has moved to the other end of the venue, in front of another static stage featuring the Kami Band. Still with us?

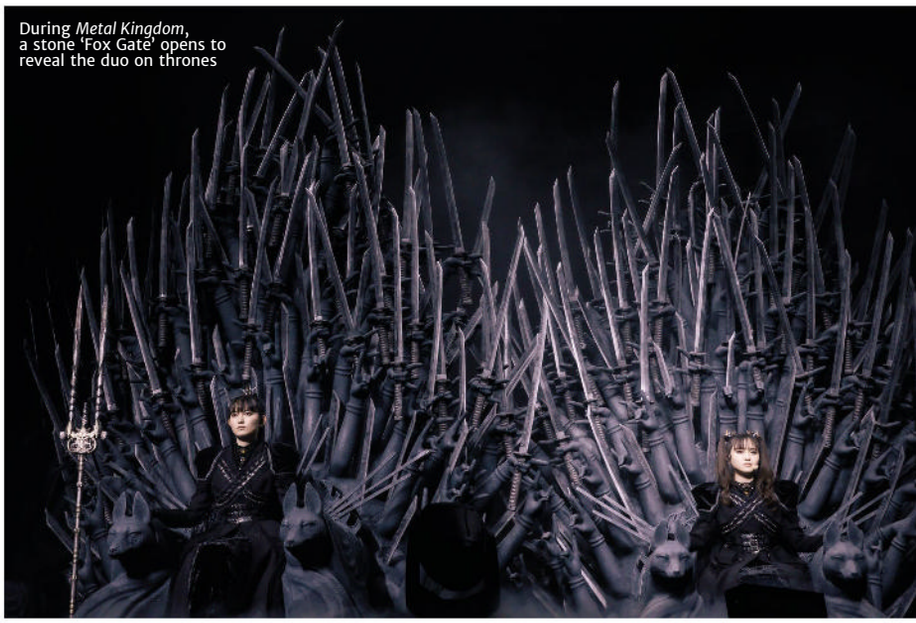
During *Pa Pa Ya!!*, red and orange lights flash as pyro explodes, while the crowd whirl souvenir scarves above their heads like a Japanese version of Skindred's Newport Helicopter. New Bring Me-inflected song *Monochrome* begins with a round of gunfire drumming, and the girls are thrown into dramatic light and shade. "Take your phone out!" yells Su. "Turn on your light!" The sight is breathtaking.

But the most WTF moment comes during upbeat 2013 classic *Doki Doki * Morning*. Before the song, the words 'The Other One. In The Metalverse Of Madness' flash onto screens in the Marvel font. A voiceover says that beyond the Fox Gate, there is a world we can't even imagine. A parallel world, in which there exists a lifeform beyond comprehension – but are they a threat, or are they a friend? The gate of the new world is about to open…

"THERE WERE TIMES I FELT I WAS NOT LOVED"

MOAMETAL

The girls begin on the round stage, in front of the Kami Band – who, despite being out of the spotlight tonight, are Slipknot levels of thunderous. It glides towards the middle of the room – and then, *another* round stage sails up to meet it. Another round stage with *another* Babymetal on it, dressed in the red-and-black colour scheme of their earlier days. They mirror each other's dancing, collapsing in a heap at the end. It is truly surreal. Then they disappear, as if they were never there.



During *Metal Kingdom*, a stone 'Fox Gate' opens to reveal the duo on thrones

There's one more surprise. After closer *The Legend*, the Kami Band vanish. In near darkness, on opposite sides of the stage, Su and Moa ascend a flight of stairs, red horizontal strip lights appearing with every step. They pause in front of neon white coffin outlines, and a booming noise rings out like an advert for Dolby surround sound.

The lights come up. It's only 7.30pm, but it feels like we've been inside their Metalverse for hours.

The next afternoon, several hundred Babymetal fans assemble for a group photo on a staircase outside Makuhari Messe. Tipped off by a Tweet from ChiyoMetal, owner of a Fox God-themed bar in Tokyo's bustling Shinjuku, we've come to take a look.

One of the fans on the staircase is Ukky, an engineer from Kawasaki, an hour and a half away. Ukky has been a Babymetal fan "for about five or six years". He's wearing a new Babymetal hoodie and holding a purple puppet of the Kami Band's Ohmura Takayoshi. Impressively, it plays a pink guitar. It turns out he built it himself.

"This took about a month to make," he says with a smile. "First I bought a book about how to make a puppet, and then I made the guitar with a 3D printer."

Ukky is part of a Facebook group called Bokuchi-kai. They're having an aftershow meet-up at a nearby izakaya ▶

BABYMETAL X SABATON

Cake! Tacos! Potatoes! Su and Moa answer some questions from their Swedish future tourmates

What's the best thing about being in Babymetal?
Su-metal: "Meeting so many legends! We had the honour of collaborating with Rob Halford from Judas Priest, and we were the opening act for Metallica, who introduced me to metal music."

If Sabaton could offer you any Swedish dish, which one would you want?
Moametal: "I definitely want to try Kroppkaka and Hasselbackspotatis! I am a potato lover, so I definitely cannot pull these two off my list. Also, [layered cream cake] Prinsesstårta! But Su-metal doesn't have as much of a sweet tooth, so I'll have it all to myself! Ha ha! I hope they feed us a ton! I would love to try Sabaton's recommendations also!"

What are you most looking forward to on the tour?
Su-metal: "To see our fans and perform! Doing show after show is hard work but, due to the pandemic, I've been itching to perform again and I've come to realise that I truly love it."

Being Japanese, where do you experience the biggest cultural differences on tour?
Moametal: "There are many instances when I feel cultural differences. But to be honest, I've never struggled with it. One thing I would say is Japan's restrooms are very clean and efficient, and so I would love to see other restrooms around the world become like ours. Also, I'm always surprised at the bigger portion sizes outside of Japan. I like to try a variety of food, so I love sharing food with Su-metal and our team. To be able to experience touring around the world is so rewarding, as I get to see so many cultural differences and so many people!"

Did you grow up listening to the 'classic metal bands', or do you come from a different background?
Su-metal: "I would listen to the bands that Babymetal's music was inspired by, like Metallica, Limp Bizkit, Bring Me The Horizon and Dragonforce."
Moametal: "I'd never listened to metal bands before Babymetal. I love Japanese anime culture, so I'd listen to anime songs and J-pop and J-rock. I still like that genre of music, but I'm really lucky that Babymetal introduced me to metal."

PRESS/TAKU FUJII

"I SPOKE TO THE BACKSTREET BOYS ABOUT COLLABORATING!"

MOAMETAL

– a type of informal restaurant, where groups of friends or colleagues meet to let loose – but he can't attend, because he has to get home to his family.

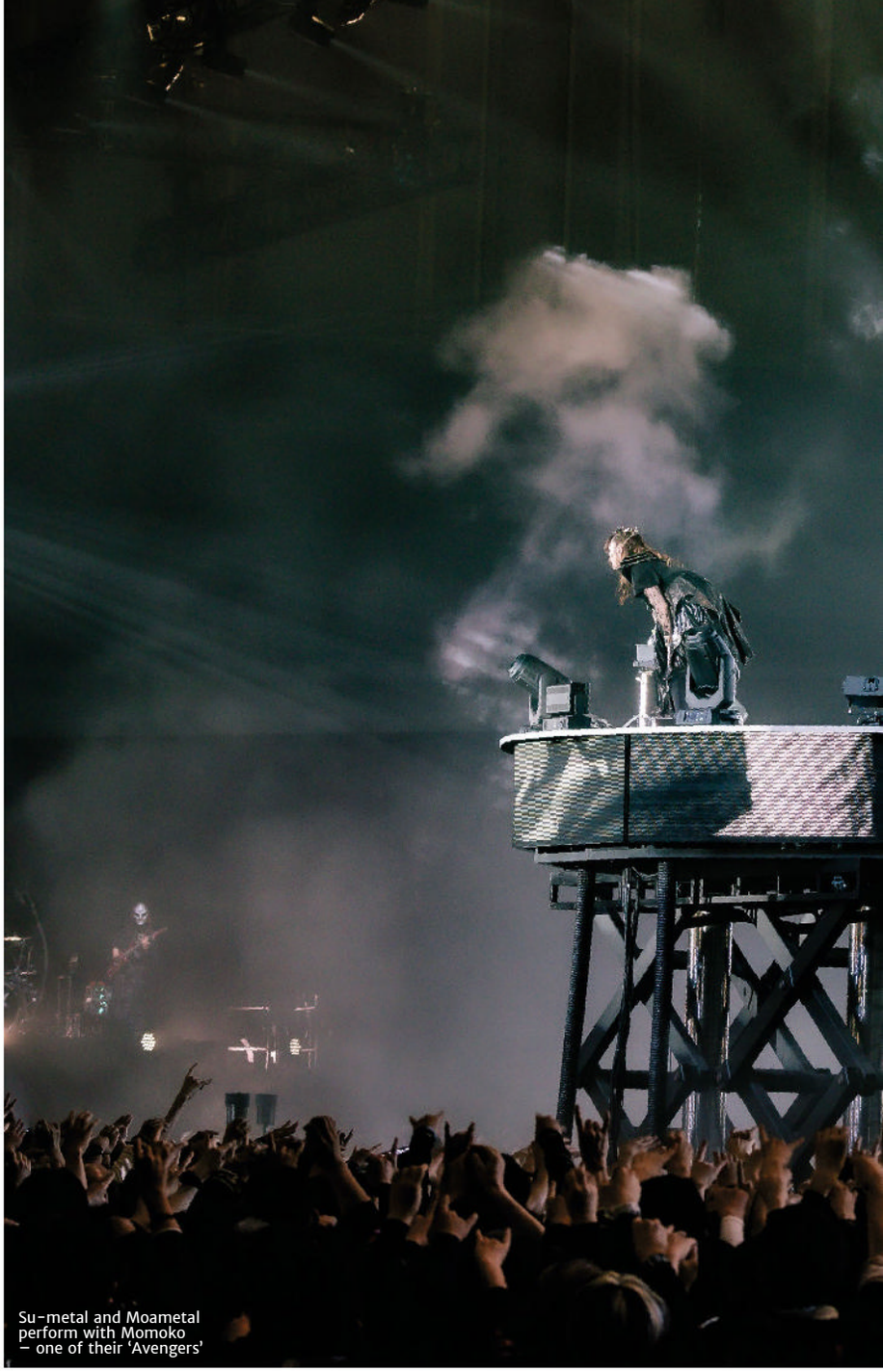
Can *we* go to the meet-up?

He smiles and says he thinks it'll be OK, but he'll have to ask his Leader. We exchange email addresses, and he takes a selfie with us as proof of identity. Then, we wait.

At 5pm, show two begins. This time, we notice more details. The new songs are mid-paced and mature, with choreography to match – there's a greater emphasis on hand gestures, rather than frantic jumps or exaggerated facial expressions, making the likes of *Gimme Chocolate!!* seem sweetly ironic. It's not surprising, given Su is now 25 and Moa is 23. Later, Su will tell us that *Divine Attack - Shingeki* is the first song she's written lyrics for. "From here, a new journey begins once again. It is a song about our determination to pave another path," she will say mysteriously.

The audience are rowdier, too, perhaps now accustomed to shouting behind their masks. Although there's a special 'Silent Mosh'sh Pit' area for people who have children or just don't want to get pushed around, the regular pit goes off for *Headbangeeeeerrrrr!!!!!* with its 'dogeza headbanging', where people fall to their knees and bow.

It's pretty much the same show as last night, but, because this is Babymetal, there's one final reveal. Fox Day – April 1 – will bring a new stage for Babymetal, "together with a departure into a new world". Two more shows are announced, for April 1 and 2 at Yokohama's Pia Arena. Then, Su-metal and Moametal advance to their coffins like before. But this time, a *third* coffin appears in the middle, together with an unknown third person, their back to the audience. The atmosphere is electric.



Su-metal and Moametal perform with Momoko – one of their 'Avengers'

The venue is emptying, and from backstage we can hear Bury Tomorrow's *Earthbound* blasting over the PA. A rep from Amuse, Babymetal's management company, appears with Su and Moa. They are still in their costumes, their holographic neck-pieces shining brightly under the harsh lighting. We congratulate them on the shows – so much energy! – and they say 'thank you', eyes smiling above white masks.

The Amuse rep asks if we noticed anything different about tonight's show. Yes, we say – there was a third coffin! And a third member! But who is it? "Only the Fox God knows!" they giggle in unison. Well, it was worth a shot…

We ask about the hiatus. The band were only gone for a year, and during that time, they obviously worked on fourth album *The Other One*. Yet, with a question mark hanging over their future, it felt like much longer for fans. Was there any doubt about the band continuing?

"I love Babymetal. I love our team, I love our fans more than anything, and everyone at *Metal Hammer*," says Moa. "But to be honest, there have been times when I felt unsure if I could continue or not. Words or attitude without any love will hurt people. There were times when no matter how much I put into performing, I felt as if I was not loved.

"At that moment in time, someone at *Metal Hammer* said, 'Your dancing is incredible! I can't imagine Babymetal without the dance component!' I felt so happy to hear and realise that people notice my dancing. Being commended is always a great feeling, and as I'm saying this, I realise I'm so basic, aren't I? Ha ha!"

We ask for more details about why she felt she wasn't loved, but none are forthcoming – though when musicians express sentiments like this, it's often related to unkind commentators online. Moving on to *The Other One*, we try to uncover more about the concept.

"It's about Babymetal's other story in which 10 parallel worlds were discovered," says Su. "All 10 tracks are based on myths, and each track represents a myth."

The myths are drawn from many countries, not just Japan, and the 10 worlds are called Cavalry, Illusions, Coffin, Inverted Mirror Reflection, Monochrome, Smoke, Light And Darkness, Transition, Mirror and Throne. In October 2021, back when the band was 'sealed', a new piece of merch called Black Box was released, featuring postcards of the band depicted in these parallel worlds, plus online access to snippets of unreleased music. These snippets were then 'restored' to become the songs on *The Other One*. No doubt we'll spend *hours* trying to make sense of the concept.

"It's a bit difficult, isn't it?" smiles Moa. "To put it simply, it's like Babymetal existing in a world separate from the

one we see now. And I think the title points to that 'other' Babymetal that exists in a parallel universe."

When we ask who was in the alternative Babymetal during *Doki Doki * Morning*, we don't get an answer…

Babymetal founder/producer/Fox God emissary Kobametal materialises. It took him two-three months to think up the production for these comeback shows, he explains. Once he had the idea for the symbol for *The Other One* – two interlinking Os that represent the infinity symbol – it came to him quickly, and he's already planning for April. The trio thank us for coming, and present us with a gift bag containing a t-shirt and a transparent coffin keyring. We wave goodbye and leave them to a well-earned rest.

Back in the foyer of Makuhari Messe, we check our inbox. There's an email from Ukky about the aftershow get-together, containing the address of the restaurant: Inawaraya Kaihin-makuhariten, on the first floor of the Excellio Makuhari shopping mall, a 20-minute walk down Chiba's wide, immaculate streets. The Leader has approved our request.

When we arrive at the door, a stern-looking man in a Babymetal t-shirt is sitting behind a wooden table with some papers attached to a clipboard – presumably a guestlist – and he won't let us in. After several minutes of back and forth, he goes inside, and returns with a man wearing a name badge that says 'Vins Metal'. "*Metal Hammer*?" We nod, and he opens the door.

Vins Metal introduces us to the Leader – Susumu. Grinning from ear to ear, he leads us up the room and yells, "*METAL HAMMER*!" In response, everyone rises and cheers "*METAL HAMMER*!", some standing on their seats and others filming us on their phones.

Susumu grabs hold of Hiroshi, a 74-year-old senior research assistant at Virginia Tech in the US, who's fluent in English. He waves his arm, and everyone sitting along the side of his table immediately gets up, abandoning their food and drinks to make way for us. We remove our shoes and take a seat.

Susumu discovered Babymetal after his son showed him the video for *Akatsuki*, but when he went to see the band by himself, he felt lonely and walked out. Back then, you often had to apply for VIP tickets via a lottery, meaning many people ended up in the same position. Plus, he admits, many have wives and girlfriends who don't like Babymetal, and aren't interested in seeing them live. In Japanese, a 'bochi' is a person who attends a gig alone, so the Facebook group he formed in 2018 is called 'Bokuchi-kai', meaning 'The lonely fox'. It has 940 members.

Kitsunes up! Babymetal fans gather on a staircase near Makuhari Messe

What does his own wife think of the group? Susumu lets out a long laugh, and Hiroshi interprets. "Disgusted? No, actually, it's a very difficult word in Japanese, because it's a combination of 'disgusted' plus 'I've given up'! So, he's already paid 10,000 Euros ahead of time for tonight, so if nobody came, he'd be short. And he says, keep it a secret, because his wife doesn't know about it! Ha ha!"

Luckily, the izakaya is packed. A stream of excitable members come over for selfies, and present us with homemade gifts. Mota-Metal hands us a sticker that riffs on the Red Hot Chili Peppers logo, and KIMI3 gives us a wooden keyring with a shiny golden fox head attached, plus a phone charm depicting Su-metal and Moametal on their thrones. Minako-Metal gifts us a sticker of herself, and thanks us for including a photo of her and her friends dressed as the Kami Band in our last Babymetal feature.

Periodically, the chant from 4 no Uta breaks out: clap-clap, clap-clap-clap, clap-clap-clap-clap, "Yon yon!"

When the night's over, we gather outside for photos. As we thank Susumu for his hospitality, he pumps his fist in the air and yells '*METAL HAMMER*!' some more, and everyone follows his cue. We respond with a Babymetal-style "See youuuuu!" And the group choruses "See youuuu!" and waves goodbye.

These gigs, and the imminent release of *The Other One*, mark a major new chapter in the Babymetal story. Since their initial burst of virality in 2014, they have been working towards establishing themselves as a bona fide metal band with staying power. If second album *Metal Resistance* capitalised on their newfound fame, and 2019's *Metal Galaxy* cemented it with collaborators such as Sabaton's Joakim Brodén and Arch Enemy's Alissa White-Gluz, *The Other One* feels like a sleeker, more grown-up statement about Babymetal in 2023. Or Babymetal and their interdimensional counterparts, to be exact.

"The theme this time around was The Other One – the other Babymetal we never knew existed. Therefore, this concept album needed to be comprised only of us," says Moametal. "Although no guest singers were involved, now that I think about it, since we're exploring the Babymetal from another dimension we never knew existed, maybe *we* are the guest singers!"

The girls still have ambitions to fulfil. Su-metal would like to collaborate with Bring Me The Horizon again, and Rammstein – "It would be so cool to blow fire!".

Moametal's are more… unexpected. "Recently, I had the opportunity to speak to the Backstreet Boys and we spoke about how we would love to perform together," she reveals. "I think it would be so fun and interesting to go beyond genres and collaborate with them. Also, I would love to collaborate with Måneskin. I was surprised to hear that they were actually younger than us, because I totally thought they were older than me. But us both being in the same generation, I feel so inspired and also motivated."

Su-metal ushers Babymetal into the next chapter of their mysterious story

"IT WOULD BE SO COOL TO BLOW FIRE!"

SU-METAL

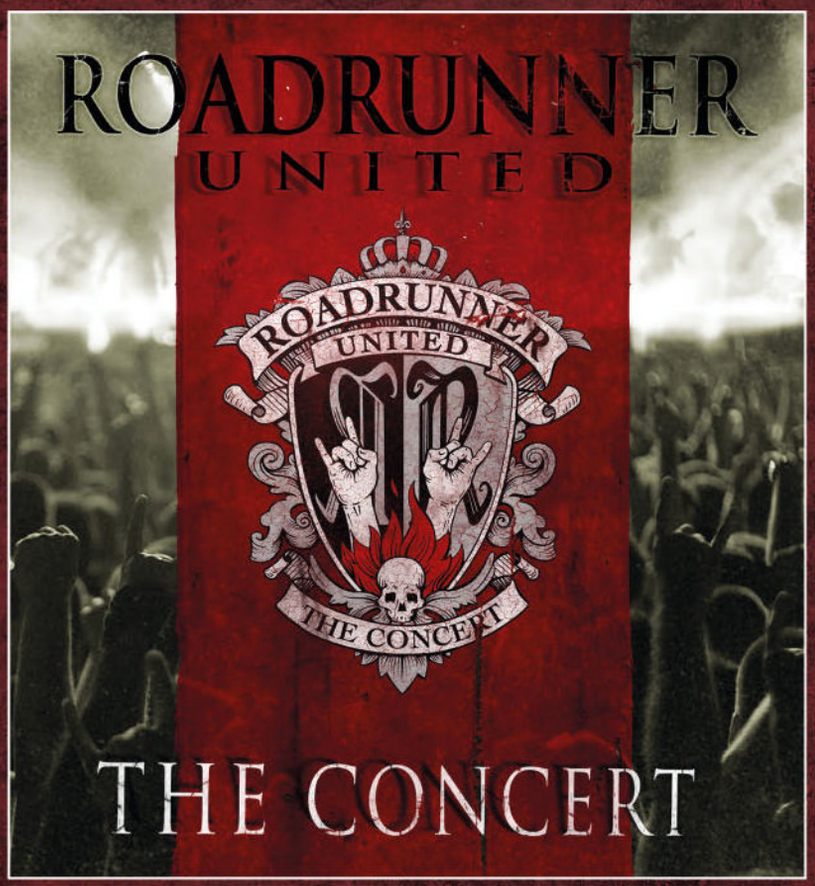
In turn, Babymetal have paved the way for the next generation. Later this week, we go for dinner with rising metallers Hanabie. With a song called *We Love Sweets* and an immense sense of fun, singer Yukina cites them as an influence. "I feel honoured that a Japanese band like us is getting a lot of attention," says Su-metal. "I would love to be onstage with them one day."

As for the immediate future, the third member (Momoko? Yui?!), and the parallel-universe (Doki Doki * Morning Babymetal?) All we can do is cross our kitsunes and hope for more intel on Fox Day.

"Babymetal is constantly growing and evolving, and I believe change is always good," says Moametal. "At times, I want to be a bit lazy and slack off, but when I think about your radiant smiles, I know I need to shake it off and do my best! Even while I am being interviewed right now, I am growing, so I don't want you to miss a single second of it. Please keep your eyes on us, OK?"

***THE OTHER ONE* IS OUT ON MARCH 24 VIA COOKING VINYL. BABYMETAL SUPPORT SABATON IN THE UK FROM APRIL 14**

PRESS/TAKU FUJII



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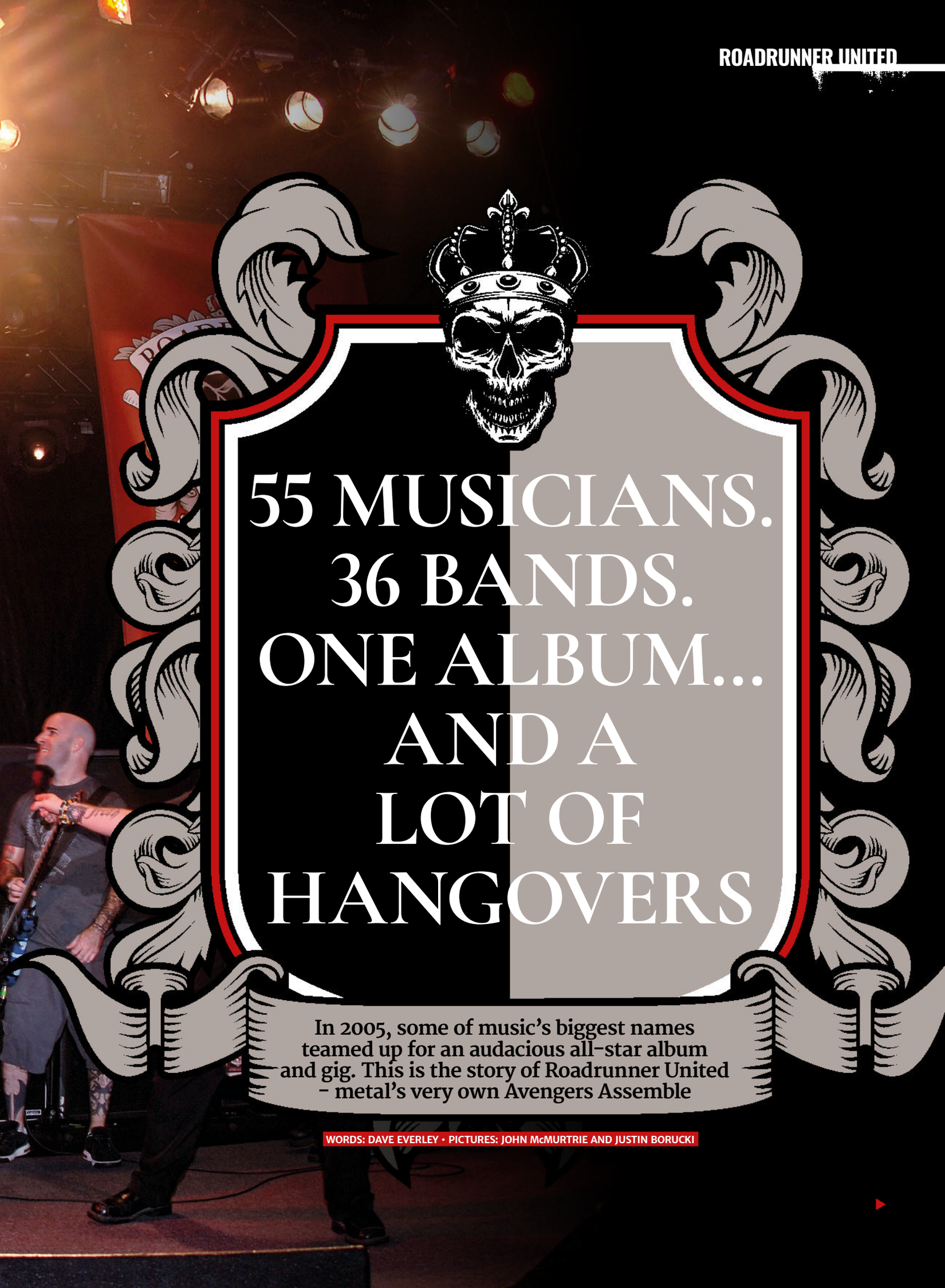


55 MUSICIANS. 36 BANDS. ONE ALBUM... AND A LOT OF HANGOVERS

In 2005, some of music's biggest names teamed up for an audacious all-star album and gig. This is the story of Roadrunner United – metal's very own Avengers Assemble

WORDS: DAVE EVERLEY • PICTURES: JOHN McMURTRIE AND JUSTIN BORUCKI

In 2004, Roadrunner Records founder Cees Wessels called a meeting. The man who had started the label in Holland in 1980 wanted to mark its approaching 25th anniversary, and he was looking for ideas.

"There were all the usual suggestions for books and documentaries," says Monte Conner, at the time the label's Senior VP of A&R and someone who worked for Roadrunner from 1987 to 2012. "But in typical Cees fashion, he went, 'Go broke or go home.' He wanted to do something big."

It was Monte himself who hit on the biggest idea of all: an album featuring brand-new songs written and performed by an all-star line-up of Roadrunner musicians past and present. And it was Monte who was tasked with turning this epic undertaking into reality.

The project, christened Roadrunner United, spawned 2005's *All-Star Sessions* album, a one-off gig and a live record/DVD. It was more than just an anniversary celebration – it was confirmation of the place the label had carved out for itself at the centre of metal culture over the previous decade.

The seed for Roadrunner United was planted by Mark Palmer, who ran the label's UK office. He suggested enlisting a group of 'name' Roadrunner musicians to record a single to mark the label's anniversary. Monte Conner liked the idea, but figured they could take it further.

Monte: "I thought, 'Why don't we make it a full-blown album?' The closest thing I could think of was the Probot record, where Dave Grohl wrote a bunch of songs and got in a guest singer for each track. I was, like, 'Let's do that, but on an even bigger level.'"

Dino Cazares (Fear Factory): "People loved Roadrunner Records. If you bought a record that had the Roadrunner label on it, you knew you were going to like it."

Matt Heafy (Trivium): "It was a cultural force. You weren't just into a band or two from Roadrunner, you were into everything the label put out. I knew that from being a fan myself. For us, we had such a kinship to everyone we were signed with."

Monte: "We had maybe 12 to 14 months to get this thing ready and released. That is not a lot of time for a regular record, let alone something like this. It was, like, 'Oh fuck, how am I gonna get this done?'"

His solution was to appoint four 'team captains', each of whom would take on the burden of writing a batch of songs and recording them all with different musicians from the Roadrunner stable.

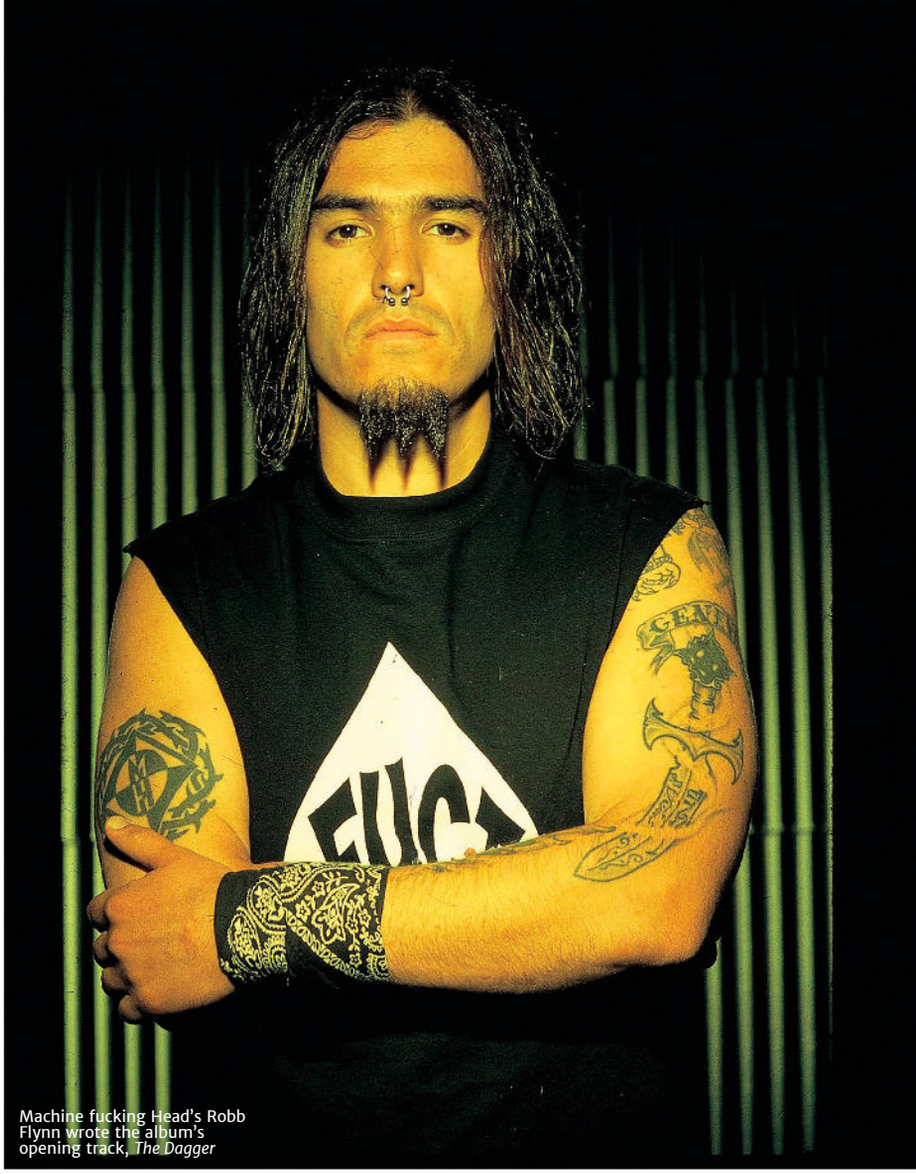
Monte: "The team captains had to be musicians of a certain calibre, but also the people who were the primary songwriters, the movers and the shakers in their band. It was pretty easy to pick Robb Flynn, Dino Cazares, Joey Jordison. Those guys were Roadrunner veterans."

Matt Sepanic (engineer, Joey Jordison's team): "Joey freaked out to be part of it, let alone be a captain. It was the perfect project for him. He would have been cool just playing drums on some of the tracks."

Monte: "We also wanted to get a new-school person in. The person I originally wanted to be the fourth team captain, before Matt Heafy, was Adam D from Killswitch Engage."

Matt Heafy: "I did not know that, but he would have made more sense at the time."

Monte: "Adam agreed to do it, but he was a real hot producer at the time and he was busy with Killswitch. Sure enough, at a certain point, he was like, 'I just can't do this, I'm too busy.' We were left scrambling to find another captain to replace him. The Trivium album hadn't come out at that point, but we had an inkling it was going to be big. I guess it was a risk picking Matt. He was 18 at the time – young, inexperienced compared to the other guys – but he just killed it."



Machine fucking Head's Robb Flynn wrote the album's opening track, *The Dagger*

Matt Heafy: "I received an email from my manager, saying, 'Hey, Monte's got this project and they want you to be one of the team captains. The other ones are Joey Jordison, Robb Flynn and Dino Cazares.' I went, 'That's incredible, I'm in!'"

Monte: "I put together a list of 50 or 60 musicians who had been meaningful and who I thought should be represented on the record. We even opened it up to Nickelback. Maybe they didn't want to do it or it didn't fit them. But I pretty much left it to the team captains to pick who they wanted on their songs."

Dino: "Monte originally said, 'You should pick four guys and go in the studio and record the tracks.' I thought, 'Four guys? I wanna call all of my friends who are on Roadrunner here in Los Angeles!'"

Monte: "We hired Lora Richardson as project co-ordinator. She was fucking incredible, a complete dynamo. She was like a general organising this thing – she'd crack the whip and inspire fear. This record could never have happened without her."

The four team captains set up base in their respective studios: Dino in LA, Joey in Des Moines, Matt in Sanford, Florida, and Robb Flynn in Oakland. The supporting cast included members of bands ranging from Soulfly, Coal Chamber and Type O Negative to Deicide, Life Of Agony and Misfits.

Monte: "Dino wasn't in Fear Factory at that point, so he was the first one to get in the studio and get things done. He really charged into it."

Dino: "I had two tracks, *No Más Control* and *The End*, already written, but *Baptized In The Redemption* and *The Enemy* I wrote

PRESS

Let's get this right... you gave *this* lot... an open bar...? [facepalm]

JUSTIN BORUCKI

fresh in the studio with [ex-Soulfly drummer] Roy Mayorga. We banged them out in a few days."

Matt Sepanic: "Joey wasn't thinking, 'I'm gonna write a bunch of Slipknot-y tracks and have these guys play on it.' He treated it as if he was in a band with those people. As far as he was concerned, he was playing with the heavy-hitters."

Matt Heafy: "Because I signed on so late, I had to write the music on tour: 'OK, I have no time, but I can do it…' I started composing some of the ideas in my head."

Monte: "Robb Flynn came up with *The Dagger* – the song that [then-Killswitch Engage singer] Howard Jones is on. Imagine writing something that good and not keeping it for your own band."

"I DON'T KNOW IF ROADRUNNER PEAKED HARDER THAN 2005"

MONTE CONNER, A&R EXECUTIVE

Matt Heafy: "*In The Fire* [featuring King Diamond] was one of the songs ones I wrote. I had never really heard much Mercyful Fate or King Diamond – maybe one or two songs. I was only 18 or 19 years old… not that that's much of an excuse…"

Dino: "Paul [Gray, Slipknot bassist] came out to Los Angeles; he stayed out here a little bit longer just to hang out with us, he was having such a blast. Andreas [Kisser, Sepultura guitarist] was out here – he does all the solos on *Baptized In The Redemption*."

Andreas Kisser: "It was a lot of fun. I didn't write any of the songs, I just worked on the leads. It was a day or two of work. It was laid back, nobody was kicking my ass."

Monte: "We'd been working with Dino to find out what his next thing was going to be after Fear Factory. That's where the track *The End* came from – he wrote it for another project he had."

Dino: "Monte said, 'Remember that song you wrote, *The End*, I think that song should be on this record.' I was like, 'I'm not sure…' It was a little too radio-friendly."

Monte: "I think I saw *The End* as being a single early on."

Dino: "Monte was going to get Corey Taylor to sing on it, but apparently Corey said, 'No way, not interested.' So Monte was like, 'We got this new kid, Matt Heafy.' I'm like, 'Who? Sure, let's give it a shot.'"

Matt Heafy: "Dino sent me the music and said, 'Go with it.' I think everybody assumed I would do the Trivium scream/sing approach, but when I heard it I knew exactly what to do."

Dino: "When Monte heard the song he said, 'You're gonna flip.' So he sends it to me and within five minutes I'm like, 'Holy fuck, this came out a-fucking-mazing. This kid has nailed it.' Any nerves I had about putting out a song like that were gone."

Monte: "The Pete Steele track [*Enemy Of The State*] is just batshit crazy. I don't even know what the fuck that is. I mean, Pete is singing in some foreign language, he's throwing wine bottles. I think he was in pretty fragile state when that track was done, and you can hear it."

Matt Sepanic: "'We sent it out and got it back with his stuff on it, and we're, like, 'Whoa, what the fuck?' But it's an amazing piece of art."

Matt Heafy as part of Roadrunner United. Remember Peter Parker in *Captain America: Civil War*? We reckon it must've felt like that

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"I'VE BEEN BUGGING ROADRUNNER FOR YEARS TO DO A UNITED 2"

MATT HEAFY, TRIVIUM

Monte: "The track that stands out as an outlier is *No Way Out*, with [Glassjaw singer] Daryl Palumbo. What's crazy is that at the last minute Joey decided he wanted to wipe his drums and put a drum machine on it. You had one of the greatest drummers in metal putting a drum track down, then taking it off for a drum machine."

Matt Sepanic: "That was actually Tom's idea [aka DJ Junkie XL]. Joey said, 'Man, Tom wants to scrap my drums.' I'm like, 'Dude, you're the captain, you gotta have your drum tracks on it.' He said, 'No, I'm gonna let him do it.' That was spirit of the whole project in his mind."

Monte: "[Roadrunner United] was an amazing idea on paper, but you don't know if it's going to work as an album. There was always this doubt: 'Is it going to flow? Is it going to sound like a trainwreck?' It wasn't until I started getting most of the tracks in that I realised it was going to work."

Matt Heafy: "I wasn't able to hear what anybody was doing until the end of the record. I was the teenager of the batch; I couldn't go, 'Hey, can I hear Robb Flynn's songs?'"

Monte: "I didn't hear much competition between the team captains, but come on, it's human nature. There were some very big musicians involved, so I'm sure everybody was jockeying for position. Robb Flynn got the opening track with *The Dagger*, that's a feather in his cap. Dino got the single with *The End*."

Dino: "There was no competition. These guys were all my friends."

Monte: "It was not a cheap album to make. From what I recall, the cost was in the $300,000-$350,000 range, which was a budget normally reserved for the biggest-selling and top-priority bands on the label. That just goes to show how importantly the project was viewed. But it was a tough process. I was exhausted by the end of it."

Roadrunner United's *The All-Star Sessions* was released on October 11, 2005. In addition to the four team captains, its 18 tracks featured 51 musicians from 36 bands, with mixing duties shared between Brits Colin Richardson and Andy Sneap (Monte was credited as executive producer). Two months later, on December 15, several of the musicians involved and more gathered for a one-off Roadrunner United show at the 2,100-capacity Nokia Theatre in New York.

Dino: "Me, Joey, Roy Mayorga, Paul Gray, Adam Duce from Machine Head, Andreas Kisser, we were the core band. We all rehearsed in Los Angeles, at my studios downtown. We pretty much took over the building. There'd be 15, 20 people hanging out."

JOHN MCMURTRIE

Andreas: "We had a map on the wall with all the songs we were able to play, who was going to play what."
Dino: "Playing with Joey Jordison, that guy was a metal drumming encyclopedia. He knew every song from every band ever. He could play anything we threw at him: 'Obituary? No problem, gimme a second…'"
Andreas: "I learned songs in rehearsals that I didn't end up playing at the show. I played Decide, Mercyful Fate, Biohazard… it was amazing."
Dino: "Afterwards, we'd all go to [famous LA hangout] the Rainbow Bar And Grill, we'd go to Jumbo's Clown Room, which is this old-school strip club where Courtney Love used to strip back in the day. The next day we'd come into rehearsal a little hungover and get right back into it."
Matt Heafy: "I remember us pulling up [to the gig itself] in a van. This place looked like an arena to us. We didn't have a dressing room. I remember being yelled at a lot for being in the way!"
Andreas: "We rehearsed the whole show during soundcheck with everyone who couldn't make it out to Los Angeles. Then we rested for 20 minutes and then we played the show. It was crazy."
Dino: "The biggest mistake that Roadrunner made was having an open bar for all the musicians. Everybody was hammered. Brian [Fair] from Shadows Fall was doing a Soulfly song [*Eye For An Eye*] and he just fell over. He ate shit onstage because he was so wasted."
Monte: "We wanted Pete Steele to sing – you can't have a Roadrunner live show and not have [Type O Negative's] *Black No. 1*. But we couldn't get him, so we got Ville Valo to sing it instead."
Dino: "Doing the Type O Negative song with Ville Valo made the hairs on the back of my neck stand up. Same with doing [Fear Factory's] *Replica* with Matt Heafy singing."
Matt Heafy: "I don't remember much about the show. It was just a quick, adrenaline-processing thing."
Andreas: "Jamming with Scott Ian on a Sepultura song [*Refuse/Resist*] was amazing. And of course, we did *Roots Bloody Roots* with everyone at the end of the show. Everybody wanted to be a part of that – we had two drum kits. So many people celebrating Roadrunner with that song, it was very meaningful."
Dino: "Just before the last riff in *Roots Bloody Roots*, the music stops. They handed the mic to Joey Jordison, and he started going, 'Fuck Monte Conner! Fuck Monte Conner!' He was joking, of course."
Monte: "That night was one of the biggest disappointments of my life, because I got so fucked-up at the free bar. I'm not a big drinker and I basically got blackout drunk. I really remember very little of the night."
Dino: "Yeah, I really don't remember how I got back to the hotel that night."

Roadrunner United and *The All-Star Sessions* album was more than just a celebration of the label, the sense of community it had fostered and its place in place within the wider scene. Almost 20 years on, it stands as a snapshot of a time when metal itself felt bulletproof.
Monte: "To me, it was a celebration of everything we had done at Roadrunner to that point. The label had built through the 90s and early 2000s, and 2005 seemed to be the watershed year. I don't know if Roadrunner peaked any harder than 2005."
Dino: "The bands Roadrunner had… Sepultura, Machine Head, Type O Negative, Slipknot, Fear Factory… There was this camaraderie, this connection. I don't know any label like that right now."
Andreas: "The music industry is a whole different world these days."

JOHN MCMURTRIE

Dino Cazares misses the old days of the RR camaraderie

"MONTE SAID, 'WE GOT THIS KID, MATT HEAFY.' I'M, LIKE, 'WHO?'"
DINO CAZARES, FEAR FACTORY

Monte: "A couple of years after the album came out, Nuclear Blast put out a record called Nuclear Blast All-Stars. At first, it was like, 'Those motherfuckers, they're stealing my idea.' But that was just for a second. After that, I was beaming with pride. Plus theirs had, like, 15 people on it. Ours had 55, 56."
Matt Heafy: "I've been bugging Roadrunner for years to do a Roadrunner United 2. I'd love to do a song with John Petrucci, Mario Duplantier on drums… I'd have King Diamond back for 'In The Fire 2'."
Monte: "There was talk a few years back about doing a sequel – Roadrunner's 35th anniversary or 40th anniversary. I don't know. So many of the bands were gone, so many of the people who were at the label were gone. There were still great bands on Roadrunner, but I don't see how they could have done it and made it as significant."
Dino: "Some of those guys [on the album] aren't around anymore, but when I listen to the record and see pictures, I remember the good times, the amazing times I had with those guys. That was when we got to hang out the most."
Monte: "Would I do something like it again? Probably not. It was a lot of pressure. But if I had to say there was a highlight of my career, this record is it."

ROADRUNNER UNITED'S *THE ALL-STAR SESSIONS* AND *ROADRUNNER UNITED: THE CONCERT* ARE REISSUED ON MARCH 10 VIA ROADRUNNER

SECRET MEETINGS. PIGS' BLOOD. MURDER?

With a new co-vocalist and killer new album *The Seventh Son* on the way, Bury Tomorrow have levelled up. But what the hell is with the knives and cult behaviour?

WORDS: RICH HOBSON • PORTRAITS: DEREK BREMNER • ON SET PICTURES: LEAH DEVINE

Dani Winter-Bates has had enough. Sitting at a dining table in a disused chapel, surrounded by crumbling stonework on the coldest, bitterest day of the year, he faces his bandmates in Bury Tomorrow with a look of disgust and hatred. He's letting it all out, theatrically gesturing as his face contorts and he wordlessly snarls.

At the other end of the table sits Loz Taylor, the frontman of fellow British metalcore heavyweights While She Sleeps. He has driven almost 200 miles in the early hours of the morning to be here, but right now he looks like an unwelcome guest. As he contributes his own wordless protest, things come to a head. Dani rises from his seat, pulls out a gun and shoots Loz. And who said metalcore wasn't competitive?

"Brilliant – we'll need to step things up though if we want to get everything for the murder scene," declares a figure emerging from the shadows. "Just remember, we've got to be out of here by five sharp – there's a wedding party coming to view the venue."

Of course, *Metal Hammer* hasn't just witnessed the bloody murder of one metalcore singer by another. Instead, we're on-set for the filming of *Heretic*, the next 'chapter' in a series of occult horror-themed music videos from upcoming album *The Seventh Son* that Bury Tomorrow have been working on since summer 2022 with director Matt Sears – the man who stepped out of the shadows to offer instruction.

With Matt, the band have worked on an overarching narrative that throws up shades of everything from *Wrong Turn* and *Evil Dead* to *The Wicker Man*. Previous singles *Abandon Us* and *Boltcutter* featured creepy pagan-style cults, rituals and a possession that ends with a man's body twisted like a broken marionette, branches snaking out of his eyes, mouth, ears and nose to form an occult symbol. *Heretic* sees the band (and Loz) gather at this former chapel in Peckham, South London to host an Illuminati-style meeting. Along the way, there are blood oaths, more occult imagery (the 'symbol' actually the logo for new album *The Seventh Sun*), and the band gleefully butchering each other. Dani isn't giving anything away about the meaning of the symbolism in the video, or the album's more esoteric elements, though he does offer a clue as to the inspiration behind the aesthetics of today's shoot.

"I wanted that *John Wick*, guns in a Catholic church vibe," Dani says as he jigs around, trying to warm up, looking less like a murderous cult-leader and more like a man who's been freezing his balls off since he arrived at the venue at 8am, his all-black ensemble designed more for keeping him cool onstage than fighting off a British winter. The icy temperature combined with the elegantly decaying stonework around us make the chapel feel more like an old mausoleum.

But despite the grimness of a January in London, the mood in Bury Tomorrow remains decidedly upbeat, the band joking and dancing about throughout the day. Having Loz on-site to contribute guest vocals adds to a general sense of excitement about the state of British metal right now.

Behind the smiles, there's a sobering reality. Bury Tomorrow's last album, 2020's *Cannibal*, may have cracked the UK Top 10, but the band themselves were nearing the end of their rope. Eighteen months ago, they almost called it a day.

"We were reaching a point where it all felt pointless," says Dani. "I was resigned to the reality that maybe we wouldn't be a band anymore."

Dani: moving out of his comfort zone

"WE WERE REACHING A POINT WHERE IT ALL FELT POINTLESS"

DANI WINTER-BATES

"I'll have a glass of the Peppa 2004, please"

For much of the last decade-and-a-half, Bury Tomorrow have embraced their status as the standard-bearers of British metalcore. While former peers Bring Me The Horizon and Architects broke out of the genre's confines to achieve mainstream success and headline arenas, BT were still holding the torch for the scene's roots, maintaining a steady, dedicated fanbase. But below the surface, they hungered for more.

So much, in fact, that they've written an album that maximises their capacity for massive, hard-hitting, crowd-baiting choruses while branching out in new stylistic directions, with elements of electronica creeping in alongside brutal breakdowns and big singalongs. It's their equivalent of Bring Me The Horizon's *Sempiternal*, Parkway Drive's *Ire* or Architects' *For Those That Wish To Exist*.

In many ways, it's a reflection of *Cannibal*'s commercial success. But more directly, *The Seventh Sun* is the result of Bury Tomorrow being forced to reckon with themselves and recognise that they needed to do more if they wanted to thrive creatively.

"One of the harshest criticisms we've had throughout our career is 'generic,'" Dani admits. "People can have their own opinions, but I look back retrospectively and I *did* feel tired. I didn't want drama, so maybe there was a sense of apathy there."

Cannibal's release in July 2020 meant Bury Tomorrow weren't able to tour the album. While they initially hoped the time apart would give them chance to recharge, soon even the most basic task became a monumental challenge.

"They say absence makes the heart grow fonder, but for us it was worse," Dani says. "It made us reckon with the fragility of music as a career, but equally it made us realise we weren't aligned."

While She Sleeps' Loz catches some extra zzzzzs

It was a sobering realisation, given that Bury Tomorrow had been almost the same group of friends since 2006, with only guitarist Kristan Dawson joining later, in 2013. With months of inactivity ahead of them and no shows to think about, discussions seemed to stretch on forever, until finally something snapped and founding guitarist/vocalist Jason Cameron officially left their ranks in July 2021.

"We can't just pretend there's this big sob story, that it's so hard to be Bury Tomorrow," Dani says. "Ultimately, we've chosen to do this. At the same time, I won't say it was this amicable parting of the ways where everybody was happy, because there's an inherent sense of trauma to suddenly be parting ways with people you've been close to for so long. But difficult decisions were made to benefit our fans, the members of this band and ex-members of this band, if we're being totally honest."

While Jason's departure had been tough, the band couldn't sit back and lick their wounds – especially as live shows returned in late summer 2021. Slam Dunk festival in September that year was their first live show in almost 18 months, and it also provided a debut for their new members, Ed Hartwell (guitars) and Tom Prendergast, their first full-time keyboard/vocalist.

"People don't realise this, but when we started out, that was actually me," Dani says. "We were a six-piece but then our original vocalist quit, so I took over. We've come full circle."

The band all knew Ed long before he joined, making him a natural fit so far as personality went – "It doesn't hurt he can basically play *anything*," Dani adds. But Tom was more of an unknown quantity, recommended by guitarist Kristan Dawson when the band decided to swerve getting another guitarist/singer.

Bury Tomorrow (left to right): Davyd Winter-Bates, Tom Prendergast, Ed Hartwell, Dani Winter-Bates, Kristan Dawson, Adam Jackson

"DIFFICULT DECISIONS WERE MADE"

DANI WINTER-BATES

HERETIC ANTHEMS

While She Sleeps' Loz Taylor explains how he ended up singing on *Heretic*, and why British metalcore is thriving again

You guest on *Heretic*! How did that happen?
"Well, I've known [Kristan] Dawson for a long time, before he was even in his first band, and I've been playing shows with the rest of the guys for years, so we all know each other well. I've been asked a lot to do guest spots with bands and I usually say no – mostly because I'm usually working on my own stuff. But for these guys it was an easy choice and I knew I had to bring my A-game to match Dani's vocals."

What's your relationship with Bury Tomorrow been like over the years – has there ever been a sense of rivalry?
"We've been playing together long enough I don't think there is, to be honest. We'll hang out at festivals, so it doesn't feel like something where we'd want to 'win' over them, or vice versa. It helps that no two bands in the UK scene sound the same – we might have shared influences, but our personalities and styles have been developed so that we're all unique."

Does it feel like people are finally realising British metal is in a really healthy state?
"Honestly, I've always suffered with imposter syndrome. No matter how hard we work, I feel like I haven't earned my way there, which is wrong. But when I reflect on the grind that While She Sleeps – and Bury Tomorrow, and Bleed From Within – have put in... It's not easy to always stay focused and keep going, and the fact we're all doing so well now is just a reflection of all that hard work. We deserve to be here."

Looking for divine inspiration?

"We didn't want to just fill the hole with the same thing," Dani says. "Dawson said 'I've got this friend' and I just thought, 'Here we go…' but Tom sent us this tape of him singing some of the songs. At first, it was him trying to emulate how it sounded originally, and I was like, 'No, sing how *you* sing' and that sounded incredible. We got into a practice, worked out some kinks and our first show together was Slam Dunk, in front of 15,000 people. That festival has always been a saviour for this band, and seeing so many people getting so emotional, it was like experiencing everything again with fresh eyes."

Put it down to the bracing January breeze, the ready availability of sugary snacks or just the thrill of being on the cusp of something new, but Bury Tomorrow seem genuinely reinvigorated as shooting continues in Peckham. An anarchic scene involving scuffling members, replica knives and a whole lot of pigs' blood – disconcertingly stacked in colourful cartons right next to the catering table – sees the band warming up by manhandling each other.

"Fucking brutal!" cackles drummer Adam Jackson as he awaits a fresh prop knife, his own having snapped off in Kristan Dawson's chest as a crewmember stands just out of shot squirting his face with sprays of blood. Shooting resumes, if only for a few seconds before a cry of, "Arghh! My eyes!" goes up.

It all culminates with bassist Davyd Winter-Bates sitting back at the table, wielding a goblet now full of claret (and no, we don't mean the wine). He takes a hearty swig, gore dripping from his lips, and offers a ghoulish blood-toothed grin to the camera. To his credit, Davyd doesn't flinch even as he's asked to repeat the shot, clearly made of stronger stuff than us mere mortals, who opt to stick to the coffee, thanks all the same.

In terms of scope, the *Heretic* shoot is decidedly more in line with Ghost or Sleep Token than anything Bury Tomorrow have produced in the past. But then, that's the whole point of *The Seventh Sun*, BT shifting the goalposts for what people can expect of their band and seriously capturing the imagination.

"It would be so weird if we'd had all this change and upheaval but still sounded exactly the same as before," Dani admits. "In the past, we've been guilty of getting overly comfortable in metalcore and releasing a better version of the same thing. It's important as a band that we stretch ourselves stylistically."

Kristan wonders if he's wandered onto the set of *Dexter*…

A big part of that is also doubling down on production when it comes to live shows. Since coming back from the pandemic, Bury Tomorrow have pulled massive crowds everywhere from Download and Slam Dunk to Bloodstock. Although often featured in mid-afternoon slots, Dani admits it didn't stop them busting out plenty of pyro.

"I'll never play with fire in the summer again!" he exclaims. "Bloodstock was probably one of the worst experiences we've had onstage: 40° weather with pyro blasting off constantly. I literally couldn't breathe!"

Looking at the state of British metal in 2023, Bury Tomorrow admit the stakes have never been higher. At the top, bands such as Architects and Bring Me The Horizon top domestic music charts and headline arenas and festivals. Crucially, the monumental success of Bring Me has opened the gates for other artists to flood through in ways they couldn't even dream of over a decade ago. Or that's how Dani sees it, anyway.

"Bring Me The Horizon paved the way for every heavy band that's come into the mainstream since them," he says confidently. "Their back catalogue paved the way for heavy bands to be bigger than they potentially would be, and Bleed From Within and Malevolence are prime examples of how if you stay the course and keep working at it, you'll get there."

Which brings us back to Peckham, to a freezing chapel where the band are laying the groundwork for the future. *The Seventh Sun* isn't just another record for Bury Tomorrow – it's their chance to show just how massive they can go, every song built around the kind of hooks and strident, powerful grooves that can dominate audiences, instantly gratifying and unstoppably empowering.

As Dani puts it, "*The Seventh Sun* is our resurgence." But more than that, it's the gateway for Bury Tomorrow to prove British metal has never been healthier, and has finally come in from the cold. Metaphorically, anyway. H

***THE SEVENTH SUN* IS OUT ON MARCH 31 VIA MUSIC FOR NATIONS. THEY PLAY MYSTIC FESTIVAL IN GDANSK, POLAND, JUNE 7-10**

THE HAMMER INTERVIEW

TOM G WARRIOR

He was the ridiculed outsider who became a trailblazer with Celtic Frost, earning the approval of H.R. Giger and inventing the death grunt. We meet an extreme metal legend

WORDS: PAUL ELLIOTT

PRESS/HENRYK MICHALUK

Hellhammer

He is one of the true innovators of heavy music, and he defines his ethos with complete clarity. "If you call yourself an artist," Tom G Warrior says, it means "you're not playing it safe."

In a career spanning 40 years, in which he has led three key bands – Hellhammer, Celtic Frost and latterly Triptykon – Tom has fought some hard battles and endured some lean times. But, as he says with a wry smile, "I think struggle and suffering are essential artistic tools."

Born Thomas Gabriel Fischer on July 19, 1963 in a village in Switzerland, he was 12 when he heard Black Sabbath for the first time. "After that," he recalls, "nothing was ever the same again." He named himself Tom G Warrior when he formed Hellhammer, a band that, despite its brief existence, had a profound influence on the development of black metal. And Celtic Frost's music was even more extraordinary, combining extreme metal with an art rock sensibility.

Frost's debut release, the 1984 mini-album *Morbid Tales*, had crushing heaviness in *Procreation (Of The Wicked)* and *Into The Crypts Of Rays*, and an experiment in dark ambient music in *Danse Macabre*. But the 1987 album *Into The Pandemonium* was their groundbreaking masterpiece, its eclecticism illustrated in tracks such as *Tristesses De La Lune*, with a female voice reciting French poetry over a string quartet.

What followed was a disaster. The departure of bassist Martin Eric Ain and American drummer Reed St. Mark led Tom to form a new Frost line-up for the 1988 album *Cold Lake*, on which they sounded, and looked, like a hair metal band. Tom has since dismissed *Cold Lake* as "an abomination". Certainly, it killed the band's credibility. After 1990's *Vanity/Nemesis*, with Martin reinstated, the band split, and for the remainder of the 90s Tom made just one more album as leader of the short-lived industrial metal band Apollyon Sun.

In 2001, he and Martin reformed Celtic Frost with guitarist/producer Erol Unala and drummer Franco Sesa. The result was a deep and punishingly heavy album, *Monotheist*, released in 2006, which proved to be their last. The band broke up in 2008. But in the same year, Tom formed Triptykon, in which he has channelled the spirit of classic Celtic Frost for two monumental albums, *Eparistera Daimones* (2010) and *Melana Chasmata* (2014).

And now, while preparing a third Triptykon album, he continues to embrace his past. In 2019, two years after his great friend and key collaborator Martin passed away, Tom began performing Hellhammer's music under the banner Triumph Of Death. And this summer, he will lead Triptykon to the stage at Bloodstock to play a set of early Celtic Frost songs – the music that made him a legend…

What was the first music that had a big impact on you?
"Music was always a huge thing in my life. My parents had a fantastic record collection, from jazz to classical to rock. We were a poor family and my upbringing was extremely chaotic. My father, Klaus Fischer, was a motorcycle racer and journalist. My mother Eva was a tailor, but in the 70s she became a diamond smuggler – and yes, that's the truth! My parents had constant conflicts and got divorced when I was six, and my mother took a huge part of that record collection with her. She was away from home a lot, sometimes for weeks on end, and I felt very lonely. So I found solace in music, which became my passion and also my sanctuary."

What led you to heavy music?
"*The White Album* by The Beatles was fascinating to me because of the bandwidth of musical styles on it, and the song that fascinated me most was *Helter Skelter.* That was the first time I was exposed to heavier rock. In 1973 I saw Suzi Quatro on TV singing *48 Crash*, a bona fide hard rock record. For that time, it was quite unusual to have a woman playing such heavy music, and that aggression really sucked me in.

"Two years later, I bonded with another outcast in the tiny, conservative farm village where I lived, and his older sister made a tape for me with Black Sabbath's *Vol.4* on one side and Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here* on the other. That tape was really the turning point. When I listened to *Vol.4*, it's a cliché, but my life completely changed. I was blown away that such music existed. This music totally corresponded to how I felt. And then, of course, I started exploring. I discovered bands like Thin Lizzy, UFO, Rush, Blue Öyster Cult… and that was when I became not just a listener, but a fanatic."

When did you start playing guitar?
"Much later. I was intimidated by the level of proficiency in musicians like Michael Schenker. But then came punk, and in 1979 I discovered Motörhead with the *Bomber* album, and that was closer to what I imagined I might be able to do. I got my first bass guitar in March of 1981 and sat in front of my record player trying to replicate those riffs from *Vol.4*."

What prompted your first band, Grave Hill?
"We were influenced by the New Wave Of British Heavy Metal, bands like Witchfinder General, Tygers Of Pan Tang and Angel Witch. We couldn't find a guitarist who wanted to play heavy music, so we had two bassists, and I just distorted my bass so it sounded like a guitar. We only wrote three or four songs, and unfortunately none of those exist now. There was a rehearsal tape but it got lost."

"MY MOTHER WAS A DIAMOND SMUGGLER"

After Grave Hill split, you formed a new band, Hammerhead, which developed into Hellhammer. Is it correct to say your key influence was Venom?
"I'd gone to London with the drummer from Grave Hill to buy New Wave Of British Heavy Metal records. This was a pilgrimage! And we discovered Venom's single *In League With Satan*, which, again, changed everything. I came home and said, 'I want my band to be as heavy as Venom!' And then everybody left!

"But there was one guy I knew, Urs Sprenger, who was into extreme music, so he and I formed Hellhammer. I taught him to play bass, and because we couldn't find a guitar player, I had to learn guitar. Also, because we loved bands like Raven, which had the Gallagher brothers, and Tank, which had the Brabbs brothers, we said, 'Let's be brothers!' So we became Tom Warrior and Steve Warrior."

In 1984, you released Hellhammer's debut EP, *Apocalyptic Raids*, featuring Martin Eric Ain on bass. This is now revered as a landmark in extreme music, but back then it was met with ridicule.
"Yes, back then it was revered as the bottom of the barrel! One review said, 'This is the worst piece of music ever!' It was devastating for us, because this little band had become our world. But we had to recognise that not everybody understood this or was even prepared to understand this. Another review said that I sang like Lemmy with the warts inside his mouth. Sometimes criticism can be very funny."

But in reaction to this hostility, you and Martin disbanded Hellhammer and started anew with Celtic Frost…
"Noise Records had threatened to drop us, so in one night, May 31 to June 1 in 1984, we created the new band from

PRESS/HENRYK MICHALUK

Tom blames it all on Sabbath. Seems fair

scratch, taking the best of Hellhammer but adding a million things that we loved. We set very ambitious goals. And this was not just to convince the record company. It was to motivate ourselves."

Was it your stated aim to create music without limits?
"Definitely. We were metal fanatics, but we were just as fanatical about experimental music. We loved Siouxsie And The Banshees and Bauhaus as much as we loved Slayer. Three of my absolute favourite bands were The Beatles, Roxy Music and Emerson, Lake & Palmer. These were all musical endeavours that combined a million different influences. So for Celtic Frost, we said, 'Let's take the heaviness of the darkness of metal but combined with all the other music we love so much.' And of course, by the mid 1980s, what we now call the extreme metal scene had begun to take shape. When we heard the first Exciter album, *Heavy Metal Maniac*, we thought, 'This is phenomenal!' So we wanted to be part of that movement. We just wanted to do it our own way."

The mini-album *Morbid Tales* was a powerful opening statement. But was it with the first full album, *To Mega Therion*, that your vision for Frost was fully realised?
"Yes. *Morbid Tales* was so important for us because it was proof of concept, but *To Mega Therion* was when Celtic Frost really became Celtic Frost. It's probably the most important album for my own path as a musician."

That album's cover art was the painting Satan I, by the Swiss visionary H.R. Giger. How did you get his permission to use it for free?
"We were prepared to pay. We didn't know how we would get the money, but we wanted it so badly that we would have found a way. I had sent a handwritten letter to Giger in 1984, asking if he would consider cooperating with us. He was at the height of his fame, after his work on the *Alien* movies, so we didn't expect him to reply to a bunch of nobodies.

"But he actually called me, and not just once, and he agreed that we could have two paintings, Satan I and Victory III, for free. We were blown away. This was when we made *Morbid Tales*, but we were so in awe of him, we knew the music had to be better to do justice to the genius of his art. So that's why we waited 'til *To Mega Therion*. And this is how Giger became our mentor and later our friend."

The 1987 album *Into The Pandemonium* was a work of fearless experimentation. Do you think of this as the definitive Frost album?
"I personally think you cannot separate *Morbid Tales*, *To Mega Therion* and *Into The Pandemonium*. They all are part of a puzzle, and they really define Celtic Frost. But artistically speaking, *...Pandemonium* was our most ambitious album. I think we were braver than we realised at the time."

For this, Celtic Frost were dubbed 'the avant-garde heavy metal band'. How did you feel about that?
"We were taken by complete surprise. But yes, it really described Celtic Frost quite perfectly. We felt flattered, and we felt understood."

The band was also hailed as "the Sabbath of the 80s"…
"That was also very flattering, but nowhere near realistic. Without Black Sabbath, I wouldn't be here now. They are untouchable."

You developed a unique vocal style in those early years of Frost. How did you develop your signature 'death grunt'?
"I can tell you where it came from – 1970s funk, which is another musical style I love. These grunts were little

Metal master: Tom's career has lasted more than four decades (and counting)

"THEY SAID I SANG LIKE LEMMY WITH THE WARTS INSIDE HIS MOUTH"

expressions to support the rhythm. With every Celtic Frost album, we always made sure we had enough death grunts. If not, even if we were already mixing, we'd go back in and add some. And to this day, most of my songs start with one. I've been a musician for more than 40 years, and all I'm going to be remembered for is death grunts!"

There is one Frost album you would prefer to forget – 1988's *Cold Lake*. So what can you say now about Celtic Frost's WTF moment?
"It's a complex story. Noise Records had disagreed with the experimental nature of *Into The Pandemonium*, so we tried to get out of our contract. We took legal action and got ourselves into major debt, and by the end of 1987 the band had fallen apart. Then, in early 1988, Noise presented a new contract that gave us much more artistic freedom. But there was no band. And I made the colossal mistake of reforming Celtic Frost for this contract with different musicians. I was completely unfocused. And fact of the matter is, *Cold Lake* is not really Celtic Frost. It's just a piece of shit."

Was *Monotheist*, the 2006 comeback album, the true follow-up to *Into The Pandemonium*?
"That's how Martin and I approached it. It was us finding ourselves again as Celtic Frost, and being daring again."

After Frost split for the final time, you launched Triptykon, promising it would "sound as close to Celtic Frost as is humanly possible"…
"Well, if you study the Triptykon albums, they are exactly like *Into The Pandemonium*. There's everything on there, from electronica, to classical, to radical metal, to new wave. Only nowadays, this is normal. The scene has caught up with what Celtic Frost was creating in 1987."

On October 21, 2017, Martin Eric Ain died at the age of 50 from a heart attack. Can you describe the relationship you had with him?
"Martin was a very unique person and a wonderful friend. He only started to write music at the very end, on *Monotheist*. Nonetheless, his ideology and philosophy was behind all the Celtic Frost music, and his lyrics were unique. You cannot replace somebody like that. I missed Martin already after my exit from Celtic Frost, and now that he's gone entirely, I miss him even more."

Since 2019, you've performed the music of Hellhammer under the name Triumph Of Death. What does it mean to you to play that music?
"As we discussed earlier, Martin and I really disowned Hellhammer for a while in order to have a chance with Celtic Frost. So coming to terms with Hellhammer in the early 2000s, as a side effect of reuniting Celtic Frost, was hugely important for both of us. And I began to lament that I never performed this music onstage, so actually doing this with Triumph Of Death is such a catharsis for me.

"It has been an entirely positive experience, although there is some material that is very problematic. In the lyrics to *Satanic Rites*, I can see now the hatred against my mother, the anger and the pain. But if you go onstage and you perform the song, the audience doesn't have that context. It's just a very primitive, violent, misogynist song. And I cannot stand for this nowadays, even if I understand where it comes from. So I will never perform this song live."

How are you feeling about performing Celtic Frost's music with Triptykon at Bloodstock?
"Triptykon always plays 50% Celtic Frost music when we go onstage, but I've never played *Morbid Tales* in its entirety in one set, so it should be exciting. It's also paying homage to the roots of Triptykon."

Is there a new Triptykon album coming soon?
"Absolutely. I'm trying to record two albums that basically belong together. Some of the material is what would have been the Celtic Frost album *Necronomicon*, which was planned for many years."

And so, as you move forward with Triptykon, while keeping the music of Hellhammer and Celtic Frost alive, are you in a good place right now?
"I cannot close my eyes to the world we're living in – the way we treat nature, the way we treat animals, the way we treat each other. And yet, on a small level, I find myself at a very good place in my career and in my personal life. There has been an enormous amount of struggle in my musical path, but now, as a 59-year-old, I feel very privileged. I've had a career that's lasted over four decades. And looking back, I wouldn't change a thing."

CELTIC FROST'S *DANSE MACABRE*, A DELUXE BOX SET OF THE COMPLETE RECORDINGS: 1984-1987, IS OUT VIA BMG

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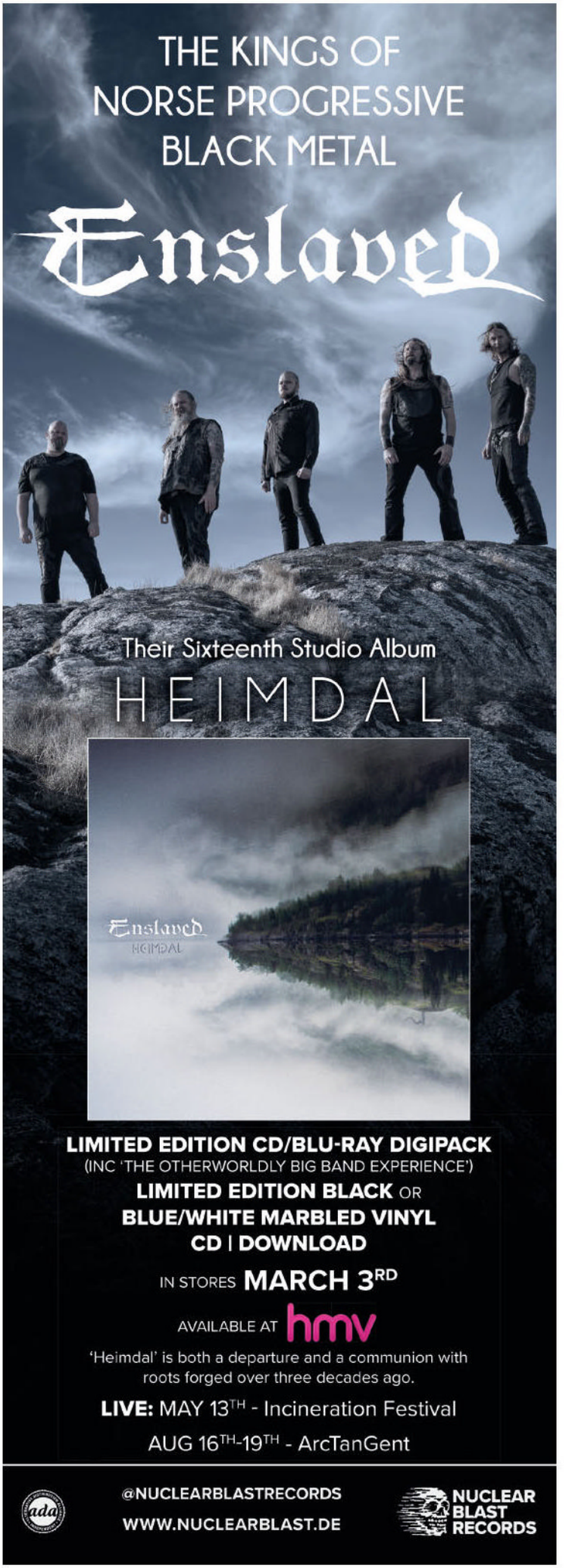
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the hard way

Circle-pits, viral videos and the kind of buzz other bands would kill for – how Malevolence became British metal's 17-year overnight success story

WORDS: MATT MILLS • PICTURES: JAKE OWENS

Malevolence's Alex Taylor is glaring balefully at the crowd in front of him. It's a chilly Sunday evening in January, and the singer and his band are opening for Trivium at London's Hammersmith Apollo. For many, this would be a thankless gig. But not for Malevolence.

"I know it's a Sunday night and I know it's fucking early, but you people in the middle, I need to see something special," Alex barks. "Open the whole fucking floor up right now. Push it back! Push it back! Push it back!"

As Malevolence launch into a lacerating version of the title track from 2017's *Self Supremacy* album, the crowd obey his orders. Suddenly, the entire floor of the Apollo is transformed into a maelstrom of flesh and sweat. Bodies collide with each other. In the middle of this melee, a dude with another dude on his back begins spinning round and round. On the ground next to him, someone begins doing push-ups. It's carnage, in the best possible way.

Within 24 hours, camera phone footage of the scene has gone viral. Social media timelines are filled with posts of the 'Can you believe this?' variety. Trivium may have headlined the show, but it's Malevolence who are grabbing the headlines.

"You know what, I'm surprised that it took so long for one of our pits to go viral, because we've been doing this for the last two years," says Alex. It's a week later, and we're sitting with the singer and guitarists Konan Hall and Josh Baines on the band's tour bus, parked outside Prague's Fórum Karlín, where the Sheffield band – completed by bassist Wilkie Robinson and drummer Charlie Thorpe – are due to play in a few hours.

"It's sick that it got the attention it did, but we did it at Ally Pally, Download and Bloodstock," continues Alex. "It's become a thing: that part in the Malevolence set where you get your steps in! Ha ha ha!"

When *Hammer* meets Malevolence in Prague, they have been on the road with Trivium for nearly two weeks, and they've got another month to go (Obituary and Heaven Shall Burn are also on this four-band bill). Luckily, they're travelling in something approaching comfort. The communal space on their tourbus has leather seats and mahogany furnishings. Alex's PS4 is plugged into a wall-mounted TV. It all screams 'band on a serious career upswing.'

If that's the case, it's been a long time coming. Malevolence are a 17-year overnight sensation. They have been blasting out brutal, barrel-chested noise since their original incarnation formed in 2006 (they 'officially' became the Malevolence we know today when Alex joined in 2010). They've perfected their mix of distorted groove metal, relentless metalcore and vein-bulging hardcore across three albums, the most recent being 2022's stellar *Malicious Intent*. Their music demands participation, from moshing to headbanging to the kind of epic pits that end up going viral.

"As soon as I heard [2020 single] *Keep Your Distance*, I was like, 'This is fucking insane!'," says Trivium's Matt Heafy. "No one is doing what Malevolence are doing right now. They're an amazing fusion of crossover hardcore and metal. Josh has told me, 'We're a metal band', but Alex and his style and sound bring in hardcore. It's a fusion that doesn't come out as 'metalcore' as we know it."

The Trivium frontman isn't the only one who knows how good this band really are. Alex Taylor knows it too.

"I think we deserve to be one of those bands that is a household metal name," he says with casual confidence. "When you think of metal, you think of Malevolence. We want to be up there with your Lamb Of Gods and Hatebreeds."

Malevolence are loving the bus comforts on the Triv tour

Progress towards that lofty goal truly started as the pandemic hit hard. Although Malevolence had released two albums before then, 2013's *Reign Of Suffering* and 2017's *Self Supremacy*, it was April 2020's *The Other Side* EP that reached the furthest. It dropped just weeks after the UK entered lockdown, a time when people needed cathartic music, and lead single *Keep Your Distance* subsequently soared its way to millions of Spotify streams.

"WE DESERVE TO BE A HOUSEHOLD METAL NAME"

ALEX TAYLOR

Once the Covid restrictions were lifted in 2021, Malevolence made their mark on British metal's big three festivals: the Download Pilot, Slam Dunk and Bloodstock. A stint opening for Architects in arenas followed in early 2022.

"We went into the pandemic playing 500-capacity rooms, then all of a sudden were playing to 10,000 at the Download Pilot and going on an arena tour," says Alex. "We started playing bigger shows and by no means took any of it for granted."

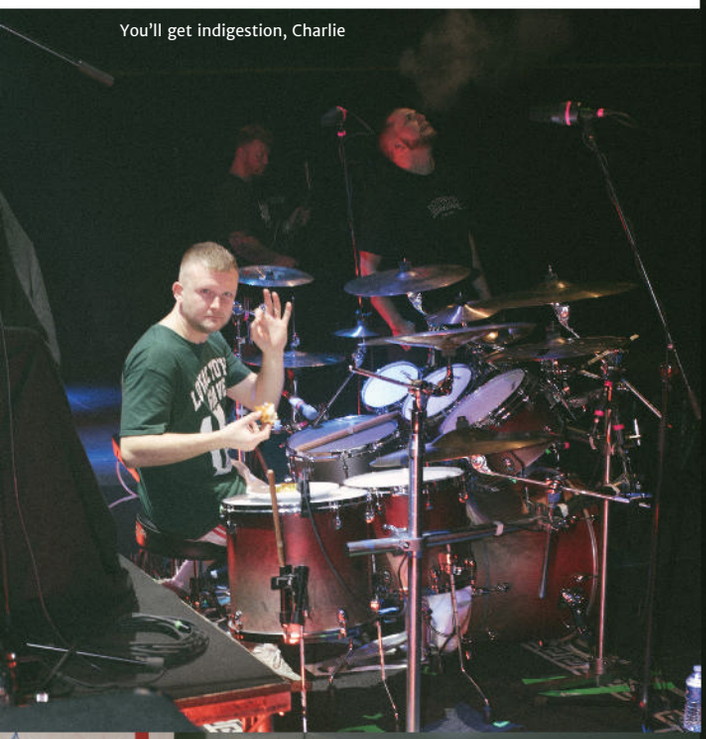
As grateful as he claims to be, Alex admits that the decade between him joining Malevolence and their post-pandemic upswing was frustrating. As we talk about the band's origins – they were formed by Wilkie and Charlie when the pair were just 11 – a hint of exasperation creeps into his voice.

"It's a conversation we've had with people for six, seven years," he says. "We've been grinding for a long time and I feel like there's an element of not getting that recognition."

Talk of the buzz currently surrounding British metal – from the success of relative veterans such as Bleed From Within to the excitement surrounding new bands like Loathe, Sleep Token and Conjurer – only aggravates his agitation.

"I feel like we've been at the forefront of the 'new new wave of British heavy metal' [for years] and don't necessarily get the props we deserve," he says.

His gripes are understandable. Malevolence spent most of their first decade grinding away on metal's frontlines with some recognition but little reward. They started out playing bars and clubs in their native Sheffield, occasionally travelling further afield to nearby towns such as Doncaster and Leeds. Their first two albums came out on underground labels Siege Of Amida Records and Beatdown Hardwear



You'll get indigestion, Charlie

Josh makes time for his art

That's a wrap! Punching pads keeps the lads match-fit

shreducation

The albums that made Malevolence the band they are

At The Gates
***Slaughter Of The Soul* (1995)**
Charlie Thorpe (drums): "This was the album that perfected the melodic death metal sound. It has all the riffs and flash [drum] beats you could ever need. It's sick!"

Limp Bizkit
***Chocolate Starfish And The Hot Dog Flavored Water* (2000)**
Konan Hall (guitars, vocals): "It had the most revolutionary and different sound I had heard as a kid. Wes Borland had such a different style than just the generic way you play guitar."

Hatebreed
***Perseverance* (2002)**
Wilkie Robinson (bass): "There are a lot of bangin' Hatebreed records, but *Perseverance* has the hardest songs and most raw-sounding production. The lyrics are motivational and positive, but not too corny."

Chimaira
***The Impossibility Of Reason* (2003)**
Alex Taylor (vocals): "This has to be my favourite album. It is non-stop bangers from start to finish! It's what inspired me to join a band and start making heavy music."

Lamb Of God
***Ashes Of The Wake* (2004)**
Josh Baines (guitars): "*Ashes...* has had a big influence on my playing and style of riffs. Seeing Lamb Of God with Konan when I was 12 was my first proper metal show, too."

Records, but they eventually started their own imprint, MLVLTD, because, says Alex, "we couldn't get any offers from any good labels". (*Malicious Intent* is licensed by independent powerhouse Nuclear Blast).

The nadir came in 2018, when the band embarked on longer tours in support of *Self Supremacy*. "We did four weeks in America, slept in a van for 22 nights straight, ate only takeaway food and didn't even make enough money to pay for our visas," says Konan.

It didn't help that they weren't exactly looking after themselves at the time. "We went on a five-week tour [of Europe], and I broke my ankle on the second day and got wasted every day," remembers Konan. "When we were in Prague on that tour, we walked out of a bar so hammered that, that night, we played the worst show we've ever played. I couldn't tell you to this day what I was playing, and I saw Charlie crawl to his drum kit."

The band realised that operating like this wouldn't help them take the necessary step up to the next level. They decided to drastically change their attitude.

"Since then, we've been making a conscious effort to get enough sleep, eat right and exercise," says Alex. "People have the idea that touring is all rock star shit and partying, and some bands do that, but I look at them like, 'You guys are still stuck playing the same shows and same venues.' I don't wanna be like that. I want to keep progressing and keep improving.'"

Proof of their approach to self-care comes after our interview. The band – minus bassist Wilkie – swap their street clothes for shorts and white tees, and converge around a bag of kick-pads, footballs and yoga mats. They're joined by their merch guy, Ewan, who does a lot of jiu jitsu and mixed martial arts in his downtime. As someone

Malevolence (left to right): Konan Hall, Wilkie Robinson, Alex Taylor, Charlie Thorpe, Josh Baines

cranks up a club-style Spotify gym playlist, they begin to stretch, throw punches or do keepy-uppies for three minutes. There's a 20-second break, then they're back into it. Rinse and repeat.

"Ewan suggested the idea that he bring his pads and boxing gloves, and I was onboard from the start," says Alex. "It's been good having him: having someone to train with and who can motivate us."

After training, it's soundcheck and showtime. Malevolence open the night at 6:15pm sharp, yet are met with a crammed 3,000-capacity club. They ignite a moshpit immediately, before *Higher Place* exposes a tender side with its clean guitars and Konan's sung melodies. Alex even commands his crowd to move forward and "light this place up like a Drake concert" with their phones, and they close the pit to comply.

Over half an hour, Prague gets everything it could want from a metal show and the crowd responds in kind. Afterwards, though, the mood isn't as triumphant as you'd expect. While Charlie is calmly positive as he dismantles his drum kit, Alex and Wilkie bemoan the crowd-killers that flung themselves about in the pit all set. "Hardcore dancing at a metal show?" the singer complains. "There's a time and a place, lads."

From the outside looking in, it's pretty clear why Malevolence aren't bouncing off the walls with adrenaline. They've paid their dues for a decade and a half, perfected a professional routine on the road and transformed entire audiences into human whirlpools. Opening a four-band bill is fine as far as it goes, but right now it feels like they're more than capable of headlining rooms this big. And they want to do it as quickly as they can.

"I want people to look back on us the way they look back on Lamb Of God and Pantera and those big metal bands of the last 20 years," Alex had said on the tour bus a couple of hours earlier. "But I also don't want people to look back in 50 years and be like, 'Oh shit, these guys are actually sick! Why didn't I go to a show?!' I don't want to go under the radar for our whole career. Life's short. I'm not gonna be 70 and doing this, so get onboard."

One more viral video comin' right up...

"NO ONE IS DOING WHAT MALEVOLENCE ARE DOING"

TRIVIUM'S MATT HEAFY

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EDITED BY: JONATHAN SELZER • PICTURE: JAKE OWENS

Babymetal: rulers of the Metalverse

BABYMETAL

The Other One

COOKING VINYL

Japan's Metalverse voyagers break yet more boundaries

BABYMETAL ARE HILARIOUS, wonderful, endearing delirium. Heavy music meets J-pop: a bug-eyed happy-slap rending the biggest cultural divide since Crazy Frog. We're nine years and three records on from their debut, the Japanese troupe having long shaken off the 'novelty' tag. But does their shtick still work? The synchronised dance moves, the fever-dream concepts about an imaginary Fox God, the audible rustlings of caution hurled into the wind?

Obviously, it still works. If Babymetal's fourth release were a movie, the tagline would read: 'They ain't babies no more.' Vocalists Su-metal and Moametal are 25- and 23-years-old respectively, guiding you through 10 songs plucked from their bespoke, all-caps METALVERSE, each representing a specific theme.

Immediately, *Metal Kingdom* establishes a stately, grown-up Babymetal. The orchestral preamble recalls that eat-the-world urgency Crossfaith once had, giving way to Su-metal's domineering, controlled delivery. The way she grapples this song, dodge-duck-dip-dive-and-dodging the peaks and troughs, etching her mark across the gang vocals, cinematic percussion, glitchy electronics – she's been Babymetal's most-improved element on each successive release. Sure, this song doesn't need to be six minutes, but Su-metal carries it.

Once that's done, though, it's time to bite your tongue lest your gubbins be melted by the sheer heaps of sugar careering down your throat. *Divine Attack - Shingeki* – packs a downtuned post-chorus riff that'd make Mick Thomson quiver, its grubby double-bass evoking *Iowa*. But as soon as they rip into that refrain? Pure elation, the feeling more Scooter than Slipknot.

Musically, Babymetal's daubed Kami Band pull their weight, shrewdly dipping into the zeitgeist as and when. Sick of all those metalcore bands *still* trying to copy Architects' *Doomsday*? *Mirror Mirror* and *Believing* show them up, and that's just a sliver of both songs' potential. Want more of the hip hop-inflected, trap hi-hattery that's crept into metal? It's also sprinkled across *The Other One*, juxtaposing the Ghost-alike sax solo in the album's denouement, *The Legend*.

It's weird to think of a time when you could pigeonhole Babymetal, batty as they are. In the mid-2010s, you could've broadly described them as hyper power metal. Now, though? It's still there, and to paraphrase Stewart Lee: there are maps, but no borders. *Time Wave*'s just Basshunter plus metal. *Metalizm* is an unhinged, rubber-stamped club tune, blending snappy snare and synth with melismatic Arabic vocalisation and that ye-olde guitar scalery Trivium so excellently wrangled on *Shogun*. Even the final run of – gasp – midtempo songs bangs.

Unlike 2019's *Metal Galaxy*, this record is shorn of glittery guests. No daft Sabaton lad doing a sea shanty; no Alissa-White Gluz ensnaring curious bystanders. Babymetal will forever polarise, but that doesn't mean they can't change your mind. Now they're not shoved down your gullet on every festival stage or website available, it's easier to appreciate them for what they are: an experiment that's gotten out of hand. *The Other One* is nigh-on no-filler, and unquestionably their strongest compendium of delirium to date.

THERE ARE MAPS FOR *THE OTHER ONE*, BUT NO BORDERS

FOR FANS OF: Dragonforce, Crossfaith, Architects (but wilder)

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

71TONMAN

Of End Times

TRANSCENDING OBSCURITY

Polish sludge miserablists wade into the endtimes

There's a mesmeric quality to 71TonMan's bitter sludge. Comprised of four tracks, all roughly 10 minutes of slow torture, the Polish band's third album sees them wade ever deeper into their poisonous mire – although they know when to switch up the pace. Opener *Conquest* is a low-striding behemoth. Vocalist KK sounds utterly monstrous as the track lurches gradually into a slightly more uptempo swagger. *Plague* is built around a rambunctious riff; it's Clutch on Valium. *War* is as nihilistically obliterative as its title suggests – a noxious barrage leading inevitably to fatalistically bleak closer *Famine*. A compelling anticipation of our impending demise.

FOR FANS OF: Primitive Man, Conan, Fórn

TOM O'BOYLE

ACRES

Burning Throne

A WOLF AT YOUR DOOR

Atmospheric post-hardcore crew show signs of promise

From the aggressive album title track to more poignant and ethereal songs *Hold On* and *Into Flames*, Acre's recent singles capture the various shades of ambient post-hardcore on the Portsmouth four-piece's second album. *The Death Of Me* spotlights Ben Lumber's clean, heart-on-sleeve vocals; *Nothing.* features a guest appearance from Silent Planet's Garrett Russell; and the breathiness and restrained nature of *Visual Hallucinations* provides an interesting atmospheric touch. Some songs grow just a touch too dreamy to be memorable in the longterm, but *My Everything*, *Feel Anything*, and *When You're Gone* all kick the energy levels up a notch and show the diversity and angst that this band are capable of.

FOR FANS OF: Devil Sold His Soul, Underoath, Being As An Ocean

NIK YOUNG

BLACK HELIUM

Um

RIOT SEASON

London psychonauts chart their course to the outer realms

These London acid rock warriors have been ones to watch (through your third eye) since 2018, and on this third album discipline and musicality win out over the sort of lysergic indulgence that can predominate in lesser psych circles. You can lose yourself in the quartet's stretchy lava-projection jams, but it feels like they've brought a sense of purposeful direction and melodic nous to the form. The playful organ, acoustic strumming, motorik beats and clear high vocals add light to shade before tumbling slowly into mountainous stoner doom chords – although tempos and energies are kept largely upbeat. If Josh Homme was casting his net for the next Desert Sessions recording, Black Helium would be shoo-ins.

FOR FANS OF: Hawkwind, Kraftwerk, Electric Wizard

CHRIS CHANTLER

Floor Jansen: an artist for all seasons

FLOOR JANSEN

Paragon

ADA MUSIC

Nightwish's revered frontwoman opens up new acres of emotion

FLOOR JANSEN IS a force of nature. Since joining Nightwish in 2013, the Dutch vocalist has helped to transform the symphonic metallers into one of the biggest bands in the world – not bad for a genre still deemed hopelessly uncool. And her vocal acrobatics have sparked reams of reaction videos, dishing out 'Floorgasms' – the term coined by fans to describe the emotion of watching her perform live – to millions of viewers, many discovering metal for the first time.

Unsurprisingly, Floor's versatile voice takes centre stage on her debut solo record, although, much like her side-project Northward – a collection of hard rock tracks she recorded with Pagan's Mind guitarist Jørn Viggo Lofstad, and released in 2018 – these 10 tracks have little in common with the lavish pomp of her day job. That was always the intention. Speaking to *Hammer* in 2020, Floor said, "After 20 years of rock and metal, I think I would like to do something else," noting, "If you are already in one of the biggest bands in your own genre, and you have someone like [Nightwish visionary and band leader] Tuomas Holopainen as a songwriter, I don't really see that I'd be adding anything by making another metal album myself."

Instead, *Paragon* eschews the heavy stuff for stripped-back pop melodies and dramatic balladry, its tone, as on sparkling, euphoric opener *My Paragon*, bright, hopeful and wide-eyed. And while there is a sprinkle of Nightwish fairytale-esque magic here and there – the twinkling piano on *Daydream* captures the innocent reveries of Tuomas's early work, while *The Calm* begins with the swell of an orchestra – the music always seeks to complement, not augment.

Many of these songs are about conjuring space. Sometimes it's space to breathe, such as on the sparse, blissful *Hope*. But more often, it's to make room for the nuances of Floor's voice, so accustomed to battling against glittering, relentless walls of sound, to dominate. Occasionally, as on the climax of *Storm* and *Me Without You*, when Floor's forceful vocals swamp the otherwise gentle instrumentation, that dynamic proves overwhelming. Elsewhere, her voice carries what are clearly personal, emotional songs. Take gorgeous closer *Fire*, a slow-burning epic written as life began to flood back into society following the darkest days of the pandemic. Or *Invincible*, a stirring track Floor penned about PTSD, but which is difficult not to interpret in the light of her recent cancer diagnosis (she has announced that, following treatment, she is now cancer-free): *'Starting life once more / Pushed into recovery / The choice no longer yours / Pushed to self-discovery'*).

No doubt, this will be a tough sell for the Nightwish fans who prefer the histrionic, more-is-more approach of symphonic metal. Instead, this is an album for those who find themselves spellbound by Floor's truly fantastic voice and who can appreciate this as a showcase for her undisputed talent.

FOR FANS OF **Nightwish, Charlotte Wessels, Anette Olzon**

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS/LAURA ZALENGA

BLACKWÜLF
Thieves & Liars
RIPPLE MUSIC

Oakland stoners find high times among the hard times

After spending the last few years waiting for the pandemic to pass, this vintage-loving Oakland quintet have re-emerged with a fourth LP that mirrors these draconian times. The self-imposed hiatus has been good for the stoner rockers, as their follow up to 2018's fuzz-filled *Sinister Sides* marks a big leap forward in songwriting, packed with Iommi-inspired riffs and time changes. Frontman Alex Cunningham's soaring vocals really impress, especially on the hook-laden, wah wah pedal-bashing *Cries For A Dying Star. Psychonaut / Edge Of Light* is a highlight and ensures the band are back with a bang. Over the course of nearly nine minutes, Blackwülf bolster their sound with 60s-era acoustic rock and the grim melodies of Alice In Chains and leave little doubt that they're hungrier than ever.

FOR FANS OF: **Fu Manchu, Steak, Trouble**

EDWIN McFEE

BODYFARM
Ultimate Abomination
EDGED CIRCLE

Dutch death veterans finally hit their stride

Can a band outlive its founders? Guitarist/vocalist Thomas Wouters and drummer Quint Meerbek formed Bodyfarm back in 2009 in order to resurrect a certain mid-to-late-90s Dutch tradition of classic death metal, heavily influenced by both the American and British schools. Sadly, the former died at the age of 31 of cancer and the latter jumped ship in 2021. That leaves former bass player turned guitarist Alex Seegers, who joined on the eve of their third album, 2015's *Battle Breed*, as their oldest member. While continuing or not under the same moniker is debatable, the resulting music isn't. Cut from the very same cloth it may be, but the 'new' Bodyfarm is a far more efficient iteration, especially on more melodic and epic tracks such as *The Swamp*.

FOR FANS OF: **Benediction, Bolt Thrower, Amon Amarth**

OLIVIER BADIN

DEATH PILL
Death Pill
NEW HEAVY SOUNDS

Ukrainian crossover firebrands light the Riot Grrrl fuse

Ukrainian Riot Grrrl trio Death Pill have a captivating energy that drives them throughout this ferociously catchy debut album. Mixing the classic thrash and crossover of D.R.I. with Circle Jerks and MDC's old-school hardcore punk and the indignant anger of 7 Year Bitch and Bikini Kill is a hell of an elevator pitch – and yet *Death Pill* lives up to it during a wonderfully careering 20-minute run time. *Die For Vietnam* sprints to the end at the speed of light and sounds like it is entirely fuelled by acidic rage; *Kill The Traitors* takes a Slayer riff, a Power Trip groove and a Kreator vocal hook and violently smashes them all together; and *Miss Revolt* is L7 by way of Agnostic Front. Deliciously angry, murderously heavy, inescapably catchy, Death Pill have made one of the best crossover albums of the modern era.

FOR FANS OF: **Agnostic Front, Bikini Kill, Power Trip**

STEPHEN HILL

DEMONSTEALER
The Propaganda Machine
BLACK LION

India's metal OG cooks up an exhilarating symphonic storm

Over his 25-year career, Sahil Makhija has been one of the most prominent and hardworking figures in the Indian metal scene, not only fronting a slew of bands, but founding the subcontinent's only metal-devoted recording studio and even fronting his own metal-themed cookery brand, Headbanger's Kitchen, too. With this fourth Demonstealer album, he's back doing what he does best: dynamic, progressive blackened death metal, festooned with blunt riffs and cosmic licks. The subtle symphonic urges and catchy clean vocal melodies lend emotive textures and atmospheric resonances to killer grinders like *The Great Dictator* and *Crushing The Iron Fist* without ever compromising the relentless brute-force energy. Joined by members of Triptykon, Aborted and Ne Obliviscaris, Sahil continues nudging his band to a world-class level with a string of propulsive volleys containing plenty of meaty food for thought while still seeming to whip by in no time.

FOR FANS OF: **Behemoth, Belphegor, Nile**

CHRIS CHANTLER

August Burns Red: clearly in a mood to celebrate

AUGUST BURNS RED
Death Below
SHARPTONE

Long-running metalcore heavies find a perfect equilibrium

THIS IS A celebratory year for August Burns Red. This month, the Pennsylvanian outfit reach their 20th anniversary as one of the most vibrant and ferocious bands in the world of metalcore. They're never ones to shy away from adding plenty of different flavours to their music, but they always retain that crushing foundation of gilt-edged riffs and pit-inciting breakdowns. Alongside this, their studio album output has reached double figures with *Death Below* – the first via their new home of Sharptone Records, and an album that proves to be demanding and rewarding in equal measure.

The opening, rapped monologue and tribal drums of *Premonition* give way to a near eight-minute colossus in *The Cleansing*, which goes through all manner of styles, including blastbeats to rival any black metal track, and a softer, expansive interlude that could almost be described as post-metal. The latter feels out of place at first, but on repeated listens – something this record requires of you to really unlock all its secrets – it begins to settle in and allows the slightest of respites before the heaviness resumes and segues straight into the pummelling *Ancestry*, which features a punchy guest feature from Jesse Leach of Killswitch Engage.

Nearly every track on the album is woven together via a transitional riff, drum fill or, in the case of the melodic *Sevink*, a short instrumental, which means *Death Below* is at its most potent and enjoyable when played as a full body of work. Couple this with the excellent pacing of the record – simmering down at the right points to avoid an overdose of aggression, yet picking up again before momentum is truly lost – and you have a smart, well-balanced album by one of metalcore's finest that will tantalise on initial playthrough and delight on loop for months to come.

FOR FANS OF: **Bury Tomorrow, Killswitch Engage, The Devil Wears Prada**

ELLIOT LEAVER

PRESS

Will it be lucky number seven for Bury Tomorrow?

BURY TOMORROW
The Seventh Sun
MUSIC FOR NATIONS

Southampton metalcore heavies branch out

THE DAYS OF Bury Tomorrow being plucky underdogs making a decent fist of helping to put British metalcore on the map are long gone. The streaming numbers, venues they headline and reaction to both 2018's *Black Flame* and 2020's *Cannibal* albums indicate a band on the verge of following their peers with their big commercial breakthrough.

So, it's with this context that we find their seventh album, *The Seventh Sun* – a record that could be Bury Tomorrow's definitive statement, and a bold attempt to upscale up into the territories inhabited by BMTH and Architects. But if that is their goal, then it might not necessarily be realised this time out. That's not due to a lack of quality, but more because, where everyone else went a bit more toward the mainstream, BT are still way too heavy.

Vocalist Dani Winter-Bates's roar has become their most brutally potent weapon, and a song like *Wrath*, for all its bombastic strings and modern sheen, is dominated by his sandpaper-stripping voice. This is a good thing, by the way. Although *The Seventh Sun* accentuates the nuanced electronic pulses, delicate, atmospheric ambience and full-blown pop hooks that Bury Tomorrow have toyed with in their prior work – *Majesty* has 'O2 Arena set-closer' written all over it – songs like *Care*, with its gruesome groove riff, and *Forced Divide*, where Dani actually does a pretty good George 'Corpsegrinder' Fisher impersonation, would make daytime radio listeners absolutely shit themselves.

The easy career path for Bury Tomorrow would be to pander to the rock audience. Their popularity may still surge off the back of *The Seventh Sun*, but that they've arguably got even heavier says everything about their attitude and commitment to making the music they love.

FOR FANS OF: August Burns Red, While She Sleeps, Architects

STEPHEN HILL

DEPRAVATION
IV: Letvm
LIFEFORCE

Teutonic blackened death aggressors go fourth and destroy

After three albums of crusty blackened death, this German quartet have nailed down the formula. As soon as bile-speckled opener *Nur Einen Spalt* kicks off, it's clear Depravation now sound more focused and vicious as their black metal elements come into sharper relief. There's a real swagger to the frosty, second wave-worshipping riffs of *Vampire Burial* – a fine tonic to the crustier death metal tremolo of tracks like *Involuntary Violence*. While eerie closer *Sadness* toys with more atmospheric textures with intriguing results, *IV: Letvm* plays to the band's strengths by going for the jugular for pretty much all its half-hour running time, sounding suitably exhilarating throughout.

FOR FANS OF: Ancst, Implore, Dödsrit

KEZ WHELAN

DEVISER
Evil Summons Evil
HAMMERHEART

Greek black metal veterans come storming back from the shadows

With a history dating back to 1989 and no full-lengths since 2011, it's a safe bet that fans of Hellenic black metal and this Athens trio are thrilled at their return. Deviser's strength is their ability to attach melodic, stadium-sized grandiosity to BM's rapid-fire riffing. The tribal tom patterns and oceanic swells of Vangelis-tinged keys contribute to making *Death Is Life Eternal* and *Evoking The Moon Goddess* sound cinematic and operatic, as they punch religious orthodoxy in the raspberries. The one-dimensional pacing does dampen its initial impact by the final third, but *Evil Summons Evil* stands as a classy Satanic salute throughout.

FOR FANS OF: Nightfall, Rotting Christ, Dark Funeral

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

ENTHEOS
Time Will Take Us All
METAL BLADE

Viral tech death destroyers expand their arsenal

"TikTok tech death sensation" isn't something you hear often, but with millions of views for Chaney Crabb's impassioned vocal athletics, Entheos – the brainchild of former Animal As Leaders multi-instrumentalist Navene Koperweis – have seen their profile raise dramatically. 2017's *Dark Future* was an outstanding entry in the tech sphere: sophisticatedly nuanced progressive death metal rife with complex time changes, diverse influences and killer riffs. This third album furthers their ambitions, Chaney pushing her range yet further, from brutal low-end growls and high-pitched rasps into melodic cleans for the first time on the likes of *I Am The Void*. *Time Will Take Us All* is high-concept, forward-thinking death metal, delivered with a conviction that truly sets Entheos apart.

FOR FANS OF: Cynic, Rivers Of Nihil, Fallujah

TOM O'BOYLE

SMALL MERCIES
Where EP is short for 'Epic Potential'

BEYOND EXTINCTION
Nothing More Wretched
SELF-RELEASED

These Essex deathcore up-and-comers' second EP is 24 minutes of sheer sonic dread. Packed with convulsive riffs and vocals filthier than your search history, it offers up grizzly heaviness in spades.

HYWEL DAVIES

LOST BRETHREN
Dimensional Rift
GRINDSCENE

These sci-fi fanboys parade first contact space phantom vibes, adding some tidy theremin to infuse their tech-death – full of the requisite sweeps and virtuosic tapping – with welcome B-movie charm.

SPENCER GRADY

SCHIZOPHRENIA
Chants Of The Abyss
SELF-RELEASED

This Belgian death/thrash crew pay tribute to their heroes. Slayer and Morbid Angel covers sound as you might expect, but their sepulchral takes on Priest and the Misfits are where it gets really interesting.

PAUL TRAVERS

PRESS

EXELERATE
Exelerate
FROM THE VAULTS

Danish speed metallers keep it strictly old school on their debut

Spelling might not be their strongest suit, but Exelerate still manage to make a statement on their debut album. And that statement is: 'We love old-school metal and want to add to the sum of it.' There's nothing here that you haven't heard before, but the Danes have put their metallic mélange together with such skill and unbridled love for the form that it's difficult not to just throw horns and headbang along. Opener proper *No Escape* kicks things off with tightly compressed riffs and glorious solos that evoke a Megadeth-meets-Dragonforce vibe. *Spawn Of Satan* is a sprawling, eight-minute epic, bringing together a taste of Testament-style Bay Area thrash with more expansive prog-metal moves. There are solos galore, and Stefan Jensen's melodic wail adds its own charm to a creditable if over-familiar debut.

FOR FANS OF: Annihilator, Megadeth, Anthrax

PAUL TRAVERS

FESTERDECAY
Reality Rotten To The Core
EVERLASTING SPEW

Filthy, if familiar grind from Japan's contamination zone

Modern Japanese culture has sometimes been singled out for adding Far East flair to western elements and regurgitating them back to the rest of the world. Cases in point: Tokyo's Yoyogi Park rockabilly dancers and the existence of FesterDecay. Their stated mission upon forming in 2015 was "…to revive goregrind the way Carcass did with *Reek Of Putrefaction*." To that end, *Reality Rotten To The Core* puts *Reek Of Putrefaction* under tracing paper, rejigging the cover, riffing, tuning inaccuracies, production and gruff vocals in the name of filth, fun and forgery. Openers *Rotten Fester Decay* and *Hash The Tongue* hit with the same impact and loping riffs – "the same" being about as close to being the same without actually being the same – as *Genital Grinder* and *Regurgitation Of Giblets*. And outside of the occasional sample, bass line and punky moment, there's absolutely no surprise where this is coming from.

FOR FANS OF: Carcass, County Medical Examiners, General Surgery

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

GIDEON
More Power. More Pain.
EQUAL VISION / RUDE

Christian hardcore heavies undergo a crisis of faith

Alabama's Gideon are on quite the journey of self-discovery. 2019's *Out Of Control* saw them questioning their faith and starting to shift away from their Christian metal roots. They've now returned on their sixth album as a much freer band, sonically and lyrically testing the limits of their increasingly aggressive sound. The hardcore-infused beatdowns of *Off The Rails* and the title track showcase the band at their heaviest yet, and while they've toyed with the hallmarks of nu metal in the past, the Korn-esque *Push It Back* and *Take Off* bring those influences to the fore. Meanwhile, *Too Much Is Never Enough* issues an early contender for mosh call of the year: *'Nothing was given to me / I earned it all… THE HARD WAY!'*. Oooft. *More Power. More Pain.* is a beast of a record.

FOR FANS OF: Stray From The Path, Counterparts, Stick To Your Guns

DANNII LEIVERS

GOING OFF
What Makes You Tick?
CHURCH ROAD

Mancunian hardcore mob lunge into the tackle

For a while now, Manchester-based wrecking crew Going Off have been worth keeping an eye on for those with a penchant for unapologetically ugly and straightforward old-school hardcore. With their debut album they give you no shocks, no surprises, but plenty of aural knees to the crown jewels over a mere 11 tracks and 21 minutes. Whether they're stomping about like prime Madball on *World To Witness*, hacking up a big dirty Hatebreed groove on *Self-Hatred* or thrashing and screeching like *Scum*-era Napalm Death on *In Heaven*, they're always attention-grabbing. This is far from the most unique-sounding or definitive document of hardcore that you'll hear in 2023, but it is scarily and undeniably very effective. And when Going Off head into your town these songs are sure to… er… go off.

FOR FANS OF: Knuckledust, Knocked Loose, Judge

STEPHEN HILL

Dawn Ray'd make a call for social and sonic unity

DAWN RAY'D
To Know The Light
PROSTHETIC

Liverpool's folk-infused black metallers attain a startling fusion

THIS LIVERPUDLIAN TRIO'S ability to generate evocative atmospheres using such a minimal setup has always been impressive, but never more so than on their third full-length. Taking a slightly more introspective approach, it's easily their most dynamic, detailed and melancholy to date. If the first two felt like a stirring soundtrack to revolution, *To Know The Light* is the reflective campfire vigil the night after.

Dawn Ray'd have lost none of their incendiary fervour, but their folkier side is much more prominent, fusing seamlessly with their ferocious black metal on glorious Agalloch-esque closer, *Go As Free Companions* – one of the most powerfully proggy songs they've ever put to tape. *In The Shadow Of The Past*, meanwhile, feels like new territory for the band, as violin and piercing feedback dance across slow, menacing chugs. *Cruel Optimisms* finds guitarist Fabian Devlin delivering gripping spoken-word passages as the band's sombre, Wardruna-style folk gradually erupts into an unexpectedly grindy explosion.

It's remarkable how well these embellishments complement the band's distinctive sound, as when vocalist Simon Barr backs up his harsh snarl with distant but soaring chants on raging opener *The Battle Of Sudden Flame*. His clean vocals sound especially confident on stirring folk singalong *Freedom In Retrograde*, and take centre stage on the a cappella *Requital*, perhaps lyrically the most clear-headed, direct delivery of the band's message yet.

It's *Wild Fire* that best encapsulates the album's sonic ethos, however; while the 2021 single release featured both separate black metal and folk renditions, this version combines the two into an even more effective piece. These two sides of Dawn Ray'd's personality have never sounded so harmoniously intertwined as they do here, making this their most fully realised album to date.

FOR FANS OF: Panopticon, Agalloch, Underdark

KEZ WHELAN

PRESS/JAKE OWENS

Enslaved herald a new dawn

ENSLAVED
Heimdal
NUCLEAR BLAST

Bergen's blackened prog voyagers seek out the unknown

***HEIMDAL* STARTS WITH** the splash of water, the creak of rigging and the repeated call of a mighty horn, sounded by Wardruna's Eilif Gundersen. It feels like the beginning of an epic voyage into the unknown, which is apt because that's exactly what Enslaved specialise in. The Bergen five-piece are far from the only band to have piloted black metal into stranger tides since its misbegotten beginnings, but they are one of the most consistently inventive and engrossing.

Enslaved are now an incredible 16 albums in, and they still haven't run out of ideas. Thematically, this new album reaches back to a figure that featured on one of the very first Enslaved songs: *Heimdallr* from 1994 debut album *Vikingligr Veldi*. Although there's been a lot of musical progression since then, there are still flashes of the feral aggression of yore. Multifaceted opener *Behind The Mirror* prominently places Grutle Kjellson's rasping snarls in amongst subtly shifting guitars and otherworldly synths, while *Congelia* keeps its hypnotically drilling assault going for the majority of its eight-minute span. *Heimdal* is not the most expansive or experimental album the band have produced. In places it's relatively straightforward, but it wouldn't be an Enslaved album – in the 21st century at least – without a large knotwork of twists and turns.

Forest Dweller has a folk tinge to it, while *Kingdom* mixes big grooves with space-rock spirals and soaring prog-metal hooks. *Caravans To The Outer Worlds* is as psychedelic as you might expect, and the title track builds in spoken-word fragments of an old text known as the Heimdal Spell. Not everything they try pays off. The dancefloor synth riff that bookends *The Eternal Sea* sounds out of place, and there are passages that stretch a little too far, but as a whole, this is another triumphant outing for one of the most creative forces in metal.

FOR FANS OF: Ihsahn, Borknagar, Oranssi Pazuzu

PAUL TRAVERS

GRIEF SYMPOSIUM
...In The Absence Of Light
CHURCH ROAD

UK extreme metal debutants search for the full spectrum of darkness

This East Anglian, self-described 'monolithic dark metal band' formed from the ashes of The King Is Blind with the aim to create pigeonhole-busting music that resonates and intimidates. Their debut album delivers on both counts and is a sprawling, speaker-shaking beast. Weaned on the output of Peaceville and Earache records, the quartet's death, doom and goth-peppered album is full of ideas. *In The Shadow Of The Sleeping Monarch* is a grandiose and grim affair, while the stunning, 18-minute *The Amber Kiss Of The Sun* features synths, field recordings, poetry and more. Grief Symposium have delivered a master-class in uneasy listening.

FOR FANS OF: Candlemass, Anathema, My Dying Bride

EDWIN McFEE

HAIL THE VOID
Memento Mori
RIPPLE MUSIC

Canadian stoner/doom with a difference

Reportedly signed by Ozzy Osbourne bass player Rob 'Blasko' Nicholson, this Canadian trio tick all the right stoner/doom boxes: fuzz pedals aplenty, power trio format, and riffs that could crush mountains. But as suggested by its title ('Remember you will die'), this second full-length has a gripping awareness of our inevitable fall. Even in their slowest and most crushing moments, Hail The Void gradually reveal a more sensitive side. Kirin Gudmundson's powerful vocals play a big role, somehow conjuring both Glenn Danzig and The Black Angels' Alex Maas, allowing the music to come across as both desperate and strangely uplifting.

FOR FANS OF: Windhand, Yob, Danzig

OLIVIER BADIN

HAKEN
Fauna
INSIDE OUT

London's progressive doyens curate a mysterious menagerie

Having clearly enjoyed the conceptual approach on 2018's *Vector* and 2020's *Virus*, Haken's seventh studio album sees a different animal as the theme for each track. And just like the best of Attenborough, it's a subject that results in awe and high drama. The theatrical opulence of *Nightingale* is only outdone by the nefarious clout of *Sempiternal Beings*, with vocalist Ross Jennings at his soaring and delicate peak. While he gets to show flourishes, returning founding member Peter Jones's keyboards add vibrant colour to the background of *The Alphabet Of Me*, with Charlie Griffiths and Richard Henshall's twin guitars juggling affecting melodies with fiddly jazzy passages. Metallic riffs sit next to prog pomposity throughout the 11 minutes of *Elephants Never Forget*, while *Lovebite* revels in its introverted celebration of 80s pop.

FOR FANS OF: Threshold, Dream Theater, Leprous

ADAM BRENNAN

PRESS

HELLRIPPER
Warlocks Grim & Withered Hags
PEACEVILLE

Aberdeen's one-man black/thrash army gets all hexed up

One Scottish man. A bedroom. A vision. No, it's not Limmy livestreaming *Euro Truck Simulator*, but Hellripper's third record is just as riveting. James McBain rides his solo project through eight blackened thrash quagmires, each murkier than he's ever ventured. It's still *fun*, though. *Goat Vomit Nightmare*'s leads crackle like Maiden on a camping holiday, its pace the stuff Midnight's Athenar probably weans his kids on; every piss-and-whisky Motörhead whump like *The Hissing Marshes* is tempered by overbearing, all-but-the-badger-face second-wave black metal blasts. James never sounds quite like anyone else. Sprinkling the record with Scottish folklore and quirks, the title track's bagpipes (!) come off not cheesy, but cleaving-the-firmament-in-twain epic. Even when a song's guts unspool for seven minutes, it's integral. You need this album on tap.

FOR FANS OF: Midnight, Nifelheim, Aura Noir

ALEC CHILLINGWORTH

HUNDRED REASONS
Glorious Sunset
SO RECORDINGS

UK alt rock heroes return with all their faculties intact

Hundred Reasons' 2002 debut, *Ideas Above Our Station*, set the bar dizzyingly high. They may have blessed us with three more records and a host of live albums, but fans have waited 16 years for the latest studio album. *Glorious Sunset* might never have happened if their last UK tour hadn't been postponed due to Covid, but little did anyone guess how organic and authentic the resulting songwriting would be. Tracks like *It Suits You*, *Done* and *The Old School Way* are familiar but fresh; *New Glasses* and *Wave Form* are deeply hooky; *Right There With You* is poignant with a great build and sweeping melodies; and standout *Replicate* grows more emotional with each listen. Effortlessly bringing their classic anthemic alt rock sound straight into 2023, it's safe to say that it's their best release since their illustrious debut.

FOR FANS OF: Biffy Clyro, At The Drive In, Saosin

NIK YOUNG

HYPNO5E
Sheol
PELAGIC

Artful French prog metallers weave a digressive tale

Marking 20 years as a band, this Gallic quartet's seventh album sees a new rhythm section, but also a continuation of their idiosyncratic spin on progressive metal's narrative wing. Such is the arty film noir nature that the self-proclaimed 'cinematic metallers' strive for, *Sheol* seems to go on a lot longer than its hour runtime without anything familiar to latch onto. But among meandering moods and spoken-word passages are moments of absorbing lucidity. *Bone Dust* balances bludgeoning walls of sound with honeyed, gothic vocals, while *Lava From The Sky*'s gorgeous build resembles Tesseract before the jagged edges are polished down. The album's bookended by two-parters *Sheol* and *Slow Steams Of Darkness*, and it's the latter that leaves the longest impression, as building soundscapes manoeuvre through angular riffs, elusive noodling and Emmanuel Jessua's pained howls.

FOR FANS OF: Katatonia, Cult Of Luna, Tesseract

ADAM BRENNAN

IHSAHN
Fascination Street Sessions
CANDLELIGHT

Norway's prog metal polymath shows everyone how it's done

We were promised an album. In August 2022, Ihsahn teased on social media that the drum tracks for his impending, eighth solo record were done, and that some wickedly wacky black metal was this way coming. But, somewhere along the line, the Emperor leader was tapped to help teach a music production course. The three tracks he wrote to steer the next generation make up this EP, which runs the gamut from Ihsahn at his nastiest to chilled-out prog-pop. Opener *The Observer* lands in the middle, as a wonky metal riff gets cast against keyboards and drummer/singer Øystein H. Aadland's croons. *Contorted Monuments* puts the pedal to the black metal with its acid-gargling howls, before Kent cover *Dom Andra* offers folkish whistling and the hymnal bliss of Jonas Renkse's voice. It's not the full-length we craved, but it'll tide us over beautifully.

FOR FANS OF: Leprous, Katatonia, The Ocean

MATT MILLS

Lovebites rise yet higher in the power metal firmament

LOVEBITES
Judgement Day
JPU

Japan's power metal powerhouse upsize the shred

AS ONE OF the most internationally active acts to come out of the J-rock scene, Lovebites have stood out as purveyors of old-school power metal in Pleaser heels. They've sought to channel the most European sound possible, and under the guidance of Finnish mixing/mastering maestros Mikko Karmila and Mika Jussila, they've undoubtedly found it.

That's no different on their fourth offering, as is immediately apparent the second *We Are The Resurrection* kicks in. It's an all-out shredfest from the get-go, powered by the outrageously talented guitarists, Miyako Watanabe and Midori Tatematsu – a duo with the virtuosity and showmanship to rival Dragonforce's Sam Totman and Herman Li. With equally talented new bassist Fami, Lovebites have perfected the power metal recipe. *Judgement Day* is a relentlessly fast-paced ode to the likes of Helloween and Stratovarius (try humming the chorus of *Black Diamond* over almost any of these songs, and it fits), with ear-shatteringly high harmonised vocals from singer Asami, drums that could induce carpal tunnel syndrome just by listening to them and soaring, triumphant choruses.

What's perhaps most interesting about Lovebites is how this young band all but reject modernity in order to replicate the sound of NWOBHM and power metal. In many ways, *Judgement Day* is timeless. The galloping riff in the intro to *Wicked Witch* could have been written any time between 1980 and today, while standout track *Stand And Deliver (Shoot 'Em Down)* evokes Girlschool and Warlock. Asami's final, hair-raising wail of *'Judgement daaay!'* on the title track would make Doro proud.

Theirs is a curious journey, but they've more than proven themselves. With the pace of the album never varying, however, the second half sounds rather samey. Now that they've mastered the power metal formula, some divergence from it would be welcome in future.

FOR FANS OF: Helloween, Stratovarius, Dragonforce

CATHERINE MORRIS

PRESS

Ne Obliviscaris: still thinking outside the prog metal box

NE OBLIVISCARIS

Exul

SEASON OF MIST

Symphonic prog-death technicians let the melodies fly free

ON PAPER, *EXUL*, much like every Ne Obliviscaris album before it, looks ready to rampage its way straight into self-indulgence. Quarter-of-an-hour-long songs with jazz basslines, violin solos, nonstop blastbeats and two singers? Sounds like quite the overblown way to announce how far up your own arse your head is, but OK. However, with every statement these progressive/symphonic death metal maximalists blare out, they trim their frills and find more and more breaks for hooks between the marathons of noodling. That, by extension, makes this fourth full-length the most refined and accessible release the Aussies have stamped their name onto.

Granted, the word 'accessible' is relative here, considering *Exul* starts with a 12-minute beast, *Equus*. And, yes, it smacks you with the usual torrent of lead bass playing, swelling strings and back-and-forth growls and croons. But then an Iron Maiden-bothering guitar solo seamlessly transforms into a harmony and gets hammered home by Tim Charles wailing a gorgeous vocal line underneath. If that doesn't have you reaching for the repeat button, seek medical attention.

Exul is infested with earworms like that. Although *Misericorde II: Anatomy Of Quiescence* comes with a snobby-sounding title, it gently plucks heartstrings with the sullen pianos and violins it begins with. Then, at the other end of the spectrum, the series of breakdowns, dual-layered singing and riffs that closes *Suspyre* makes for metal so muscular that it could powerslam God.

Ne Obliviscaris have always got copious room for a bit of wankery, and *Exul* doesn't change that. That said, all six of these artists' talents fall so beautifully and melodically in line. These songs should be a bible for any band looking to make tech metal connect.

FOR FANS OF: Persefone, Opeth, Obscura

MATT MILLS

INVENT ANIMATE

Heavener

UNFD

Emotionally counter-weighted metalcore from the Lone Star State

There is a punishing, yet ultimately cathartic flavour to *Heavener*, in large part due to the particularly powerful vocals of Marcus Vik. This Texas progressive metalcore band have been going for just over a decade, but Marcus only took over vocal duties in 2019. This time around, he has a worthy sense of renewed confidence and creativity that carries *Heavener* to a whole new dimension. Where *Immolation Of Night* leaves barely an inch for anything but fury and *Without A Whisper* flexes the band's more delicate, melodic muscles, *Shade Astray*, *Labyrinthine* and *Purity Weeps* all balance the best of both these dark and light worlds to provide the album's real standouts.

FOR FANS OF: Erra, Glass Cloud, Polaris

NIK YOUNG

ISOLE

Anesidora

HAMMERHEART

Swedish doomsters find new layers of woe beyond the riffs

Taking cues from past masters like Candlemass and Solitude Aeturnus, Isole have always put melody and atmosphere at the heart of what they do. There's been a gradual softening of their sound, however, and on *Anesidora* the harsher vocals and riffs – although always deployed strategically – are almost entirely gone. It's like core members Crister Olsson and Daniel Bryntse have worked out their more aggressive elements in Bathory-worshipping side-band Ereb Altor, leaving Isole with the towering waves of melancholy. This is still a heavy album, but in a stately, expansive fashion. They don't need to bludgeon when they can overwhelm your senses with such wonderfully crafted songs.

FOR FANS OF: Candlemass, Solitude Aeturnus, While Heaven Wept

PAUL TRAVERS

KAMELOT

The Awakening

NAPALM

Lucky 13 for Florida's veteran symphonic metalheads

It's fair to say that feverish anticipation surrounds the unveiling of Kamelot's 13th album and their first in five years. More than a decade since the seemingly fatal exit of Roy Khan, Kamelot have flourished. *The Awakening* continues that process. Detailing the mental health issues generated by the pandemic, its rapturously received first single *One More Flag In The Ground* is a mini-masterpiece that inspires us to keep on going, one day at a time. There's plenty more to devour. Fuelled by brooding darkness though turning defiantly towards the light, *The Great Divide*, *Bloodmoon* and *New Babylon* are awash with sumptuous, symphonic colour but also rejoice in the rigidity of Thomas Youngblood's thunderous guitar. Monumental stuff.

FOR FANS OF: Avantasia, Sonata Arctica, Epica

DAVE LING

WORLD SERVICE

Heavy metal uprisings from around the globe

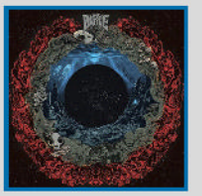
CIEMRA

The Tread Of Darkness

AVANTGARDE MUSIC

The scornful debut from this Belarusian BM quintet draws plenty of pissy-witch sacrilege from a raspy female vocalist, backed by an infernal, Marduk-like blitz and some curiously orthodox blues solos.

SPENCER GRADY



DIRGE

Dirge

IMMERSIVE SOUNDS

This Mumbai post-metal quintet encompass doom, space rock and psychedelic sludge over 43 minutes. Tabish Khidir's vocals are apocalyptic, and the band conjure a suitable soundtrack behind him.

REMFRY DEDMAN

SPECTRAL SOULS

Towards Extinction

HAMMERHEART

These Peruvian death diehards have fired a giant rocket up the old school's arse. Exemplified by arcane batterings like *No More God For Me*, *Towards Extinction* rips from start to finish.

DOM LAWSON

PRESS

KRUELTY
Untopia
PROFOUND LORE

Moshpit-primed mayhem from the death/doom/hardcore borderlands

Kruelty capture the fetid atmosphere of cavernous death-doom and the chest-beating energy of beatdown hardcore, all while emphasising the most crushing aspects of each. This second full-length is even more metallic than their lauded 2020 debut, with dense opener *Unknown Nightmare* packing an almighty punch as bleak doom dirges collide with punchy, Celtic Frost-esque grooves – complete with traditional Tom G Warrior *'UGH!'*s, no less. The combo of ultra-guttural vocals, deathly detuned tone and lumbering riffs that speak directly to the reptilian part of your brain feels similar to fellow Tokyo residents Coffins at times, but this quintet definitely have a punkier sound. Their hardcore roots shine through on the aptly titled *Harder Than Before*, with that knuckle-dragging breakdown at the end destined to soundtrack all manner of moshpit injuries.

FOR FANS OF: Coffins, Xibalba, Bolt Thrower

KEZ WHELAN

LITURGY
93696
THRILL JOCKEY

Brooklyn's art black metallers set their sights on the celestial

Liturgy are a post-everything, wildly experimental band/art enclave from Brooklyn fronted by prolific boundary-pusher Ravenna Hunt-Hendrix. The band's sixth album, *93696* is a passion play in four acts, representing Ravenna's numerological interpretation of Heaven. Remarkably enough, that's exactly what it sounds like. Primitive black metal, art rock and dissonant chamber music all merge on this wild descent into the sonic abyss. The stark brutality of the raw, lo-fi BM tracks is broken up by experimental snippets sprinkled throughout the sprawling double album, ranging from intimate whispers to clanging, blood-soaked death rattles straight from a long-lost *Suspiria* outtake. A breathy recorder on *Red Crown II*; a haunting acoustic interlude on *Haelegen II (Reprise)*; a cavernous cello solo on *Angel Of Individuation* – it all swirls madly into a transcendent, elevating, spiritual experience. Expect new neural pathways to blossom when it's over.

FOR FANS OF: Lingua Ignota, Imperial Triumphant, Botanist

KEN McINTYRE

NAUT
Hunt
SEASON OF MIST

Bristol's goth revivalists unleash their deliciously dark debut

Whether you call it goth, post-punk or darkwave, a lot of bands are currently mining the gloomy catacombs of the early 80s for inspiration. In California, Drab Majesty and Foie Gras are spinning their own shimmering webs while UK revivalists Black Angel and Naut stay closer to the source. There's a certain modern weightiness to *Hunt*, but you could certainly picture OG goths flailing their pallid limbs to the spidery guitar lines and programmed beat of *All The Days* at The Batcave. And if you're wondering just how gothic they are, *Unity Of Opposites* weaves thick slices of guitar around lyrics inspired by Heraclitus – a Greek cosmologist whose misanthropic melancholia led to him being dubbed the weeping philosopher. Dark, poetic and visceral, this is a compelling debut that hits on several levels.

FOR FANS OF: The Sisters Of Mercy, Fields Of The Nephilim, Black Angel

PAUL TRAVERS

NO SPILL BLOOD
Eye Of Night
SVART

Dark, hypnotic synth metal from Dublin's twilight zone

Eight years after their debut, *Heavy Electricity*, caused a storm in underground circles comes the follow-up from this Dublin-based synth/bass/drums trio. No Spill Blood conjure a sinister, subterranean sound on the driving *Anvil Crawler* and manage to evoke a savage paranoia on *Ad Unguem* that immediately evokes Killing Joke. *Ossein* builds hypnotically over rumbling bass and tribal drums before the song explodes with a glorious synth line that drives the song home. Bass and synth often coalesce into a mesmeric electronic throb throughout that propels you through a cornucopia of nihilistic, funereal sounds. Hopefully, album number three won't take another eight years to arrive.

FOR FANS OF: Godflesh, Killing Joke, Genghis Tron

REMFRY DEDMAN

Periphery find themselves in a self-reflective mood

PERIPHERY
V: Djent Is Not A Genre
3DOT RECORDINGS

Tech masters banish the dreaded 'd' word

IT'S A HISTORICAL certainty that whatever flavour-of-the-month tag emerges, there will always be bands who transcend it and create their own legacy. Periphery have consistently proved themselves a cut above the rest since their twin *Juggernaut* albums, and therefore have every right to be categorised however they seem fit. What's more, if there was going to be one band from the accomplished but often po-faced world of Meshuggah-inspired tech metal capable of unveiling such a dismissive and snarky album title, it's them.

A key part to Periphery's enviable run over their recent output is the self-aware undertone that permeates the polished mix of scintillating heaviness, fiendish dexterity and seductive earworms. It's these standards by which *V* is judged, and the album could usurp some of its forebears from the podium.

Straight out of the blocks, *Wildfire* and *Atropos* show the band's myriad elements at their most refined, taking in juddering riffs, Matt Halpern's fiddly drumming and an irresistible chorus where Spencer Sotelo's vocals can flourish. While the three guitarists flex their melodic muscle on *Wax Wings*, the frontman perfectly balances hostile vocals with cleans that stay just the right side of saccharine. The juxtaposition reaches its zenith as the antagonist chaos of *Everything Is Fine!* gives way to the 80s-synth-soaked tenderness of *Silhouette*.

Following on from the last album's magnum opus, *Reptile*, *Dracul Gras* and *Thanks Nobuo* attempt to cram as many ideas as possible into their excessive lengths. But while the latter's numerous ideas fail to coherently gel around one of the band's most inventively memorable riffs and a soaring vocal, the former builds into a snarling, opulent epic that descends into blissful synths. Call them what you want, just make sure there's a superlative somewhere in the title.

FOR FANS OF: Between The Buried And Me, Protest The Hero, Animals As Leaders

ADAM BRENNAN

PRESS

Lana Del Rabies prepares to shred your senses

LANA DEL RABIES

Strega Beata

GILGONGO

The next industrial evolution starts here

WHILE PREVIOUS LANA Del Rabies releases have impressed with their uncanny, claustrophobic moods, *Strega Beata* represents a thunderbolt moment: as though ancient secrets have been unlocked and, with them, passage to some mysterious new sanctum.

The brainchild of Arizona-based musician and producer Sam An, the project has never shied away from the human psyche's darker passage-ways. This sees Sam explore her own trauma and abuse – a process that has rippled outward to encompass an examination of the unceasing avalanche of grief, horror, loss and tragedy we are exposed to on a daily basis as a species. Attempting to give this swirling vortex of human misery narrative form is an ambitious endeavour, but *Strega Beata* is a resounding, chest-crumpling success.

Loops, drones, beats, strings and scorched electronics smother Sam's ghostly voice like a shroud, more often than not transforming her croons, wails, mutters and shrieks into wordless hymnals. Genres are smashed, spliced and mixed like the toxic ingredients for flying ointment ground down in a witch's mortar and pestle, with gothic moodiness leeching into industrial churn, tape-decayed prettiness and coruscating noise-outs. Each track – *Master, Mother* and *Forgive* in particular – is a mini epic unto itself worthy of careful dissection, one moment sounding like the louche misery of Depeche Mode colliding with Justin Broadrick's greyscale hostility, at others demanding parallels be drawn to Pharmakon, The Body, AJA or Heilung if they'd been forced to witness the industrial revolution.

Despite everything weighing down upon it – sonically, conceptually, emotionally – *Strega Beata* never once threatens to buckle or crack. Instead, Sam channels the world-razing sorrow of her subject matter into something potent, terrifying and beautiful, fashioning a true sonic one-off that lives, breathes and perpetuates its own dark magic.

FOR FANS OF: Uniform, Burial Hex, King Woman

ALEX DELLER

OMEGA INFINITY

The Anticurrent

SEASON OF MIST

Black metal meets black holes for an awe-inspiring voyage

Black holes have feelings too; at least according to Omega Infinity, who take their obsession with crushing anomalies to new void-depths of extremity on their second album. Massive in scope, their black metal explores our relative insignificance in the vastness of space-time. Combining rough-hewn cacophony with electronic, radioactive bursts, the music operates on two levels; opener *The Alpha* is cataclysmically intense with a mellifluous piano refrain drifting majestically underneath. The record features several guests, including Cradle alumni Lindsay Schoolcraft on *Death Rays* and András Nagy of Sear Bliss, whose track *Night Journey* is covered, along with Emperor classic *Ye Entrancemperium*. *The Anticurrent*'s inescapable event horizon proves all-consuming.

FOR FANS OF: Deathspell Omega, Mysticum, Arcturus

TOM O'BOYLE

OTHERWISE

Gawdzillionaire

MASCOT

US arena-style rockers bring in a dash of the unexpected

These Las Vegas veterans' sixth album is full of beefy, melodic hooks and choruses. Doubling down on their strengths, there's no short supply of bangers here as the quartet really know how to write super-catchy arena rock. But the formula is shaken up a tad as they experiment with contrasting tonal shifts, from the hip hop-laced title track, featuring rapper Ekoh, to the gothic *Exorcism* that infuses the record with a darker spirit. The album doesn't reinvent the wheel, but it does stand out from its counterparts in the heavy rock scene.

FOR FANS OF: Shinedown, Black Stone Cherry, Like A Storm

HYWEL DAVIES

PIL & BUE

Special Agents

INDIE RECORDINGS

Genre-mashing Norwegians dial up the heaviness

Sometimes relentless genre-mashing can leave a band sounding characterless. Not so Norwegian duo Pil & Bue, who have been gleefully pulling prog rock, shoegaze, Mars Volta-like melodies and doomy riffs together into a cohesive sound since 2013. Their fourth album takes them into a heavier, more explosive dimension, adding more colours to their palette. Opener *Change Your Mind* is pitched somewhere between At The Drive-In and Royal Blood. Singer and guitarist Petter Carlsen howls like a wounded Thom Yorke over a lush, shimmering wall of sound on *End Credits*, later laying down catchy vocal lines on the Muse-esque *Slave Vs Master*. On a record that solidifies their sound more than ever, Pil & Bue are maddeningly difficult to pin down.

FOR FANS OF Coheed And Cambria, Mars Volta, The Fall Of Troy

DANNII LEIVERS

PRESS/JOSUE OROZCO

POP EVIL
Skeletons
MNRK HEAVY

Mainstream veterans stay within the radio-friendly frequency

Pop Evil frontman Leigh Kakaty reports that Skeletons "is about us as a band stripping everything down to the bones," which is true if your definition of 'stripped down' includes piling on a mountain of synthesisers, processed vocals and more production than a space shuttle launch. Promotional bluster aside, the Michigan quartet have returned to the blueprint that has provided their biggest commercial hits. *Eye Of The Storm*, *Circles* and the title track showcase their aptitude for fiendishly catchy songs with booming post-grunge hooks and glittery pop accents. But by the back half of the record, it all feels like myriad versions of the same track. Ultimately, *Skeletons* establishes that Pop Evil's prowess for composing punchy radio anthems is rivalled only by their enduring aversion to risk.

FOR FANS OF: Five Finger Death Punch, Nickelback, Shinedown

JOE DALY

THE RHUBARB
Symptom Of Failure
MILKY BOMB

Oddball cosmic doom from north of the border

Coming straight out of Glasgow with heads full of THC and cosmic paranoia, The Rhubarb have a subtly quirky take on psychedelic doom that brims with promise. On their full-length debut, the quartet swiftly establish their own unique niche in the doom firmament. Vocalist/bassist Hannah White and singer Séan Maguire combine to great effect on lead-heavy, woozy opener *Mist* as wonky harmonies chime perfectly with the fucking huge riff churning away beneath them. As it turns out, that initial formula is a malleable thing, and The Rhubarb rarely conform to the stoner rock standard. Songs like *Awful Deed* and *I Wanna Play A Game* owe plenty to the usual post-Sabbathian sources, but the Scots have an eccentric streak a mile wide, not to mention a seemingly endless supply of brilliant guitar solos. One or two aimless moments aside, this is quite the trip.

FOR FANS OF: Electric Wizard, MWWB, Acid King

DOM LAWSON

SEE YOU NEXT TUESDAY
Distractions
GOOD FIGHT MUSIC

Deathcore deviants return from the wilderness

When these Michiganers formed in 2004, they were pummelled by the underground cognoscenti as much for their moniker being taken from a *Sex And The City* euphemism as for throwing grind into a day-glo deathcore blender. Still, they did well for themselves until 2009 brought the train to a screeching halt. Their first new material in 15 years sees them shifting to the spectrum's more abrasive side. Layers of transistorised vocals, guitar freak-outs, homemade samples and sound manipulation are piled atop brief blasts of Morse code rhythms played at energy drink tempos. Abrasive shotgun blasts of redline chaos with drums mimicking the sound of hummingbird wings flapping against cardboard are the order of the day, but *Distractions*' glaring failing is that aside from *Strange Music*'s slo-mo doom, there's nary a hook to be found.

FOR FANS OF: Genghis Tron, I Wrestled A Bear Once, The Locust

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

SIEGE OF POWER
This Is Tomorrow
METAL BLADE

Asphyx and Autopsy members return to expand and destroy

If you fancy some metal that absolutely refuses to fuck about, Siege Of Power are very much available and cheerfully tweaked-out on aggro. With Autopsy frontman Chris Reifert bellowing away over a condensed blur of thrash, death, grind and blackened punk, *This Is Tomorrow* could easily be an exercise in squinting, box-ticking nostalgia. Fortunately, these men are experts in their vicious field, and every one of these 11 tracks connects like a lethal sucker-punch, and with plenty of cutting-edge power. The band's 2018 debut had a spontaneous feel to it, but here *Ghosts Of Humanity* and the laudably titled *Sinister Christians* are far more focused and inventive, while grim, slug-slither doom tirades like *As The World Crumbles* point to heroic levels of mental and musical sickness. Dark, nasty and avowedly metal, *This Is Tomorrow* will smash you.

FOR FANS OF: Asphyx, Autopsy, Nunslaughter

DOM LAWSON

Suicide Silence hope the future is still looking rosy

SUICIDE SILENCE
Remember... You Must Die
NUCLEAR BLAST

California's deathcore evangelists stick to the old gospel

NO MATTER HOW far Suicide Silence run, they'll always be in the shadow of two of their own albums. The first one's *The Cleansing*: their 2007 debut that made deathcore a legitimate force. The other is 2017's self-titled disaster, which crashed into a nu metal nadir so hard that it inspired more memes than it did defenders.

Mercifully, 2020 comeback *Become The Hunter* was nearer to the former than the latter. The wounds inflicted by all the squeaking vocals and Deftones mimicry were bandaged by good ol'-fashioned breakdowns and blasts. Sure, the result of such throwbacks wasn't exactly a mind-shattering album, but it had the potential to lay the track for a rejuvenation they've needed since former vocalist Mitch Lucker sadly passed. *Remember... You Must Die* springboards off of this reignited momentum by… doing the exact same thing.

Make no mistake: if you want to wolf down bread-and-butter deathcore, Suicide Silence's seventh album will be the sweetest feast you've had in some time. *Kill Forever* is as incessantly brutal as its title, drums pummelling at lightspeed beneath Cannibal Corpse-flavoured guitars and Eddie Hermida hissing *'Skin will boil!'*. *God Be Damned*'s tremolo picking is as blackened as chargrilled chicken, before the riff that opens *Alter Of Self* chugs so ominously that you can practically see the crowd-killers warming up.

This is all well and good, tried and true, until you remember… this is fucking Suicide Silence! The masterminds behind *The Cleansing* should be at least a year ahead of everybody else, yet they've been swept away by Whitechapel and even Lorna Shore in the 'taking deathcore to rad new places' stakes. If they can't drive in new directions without flinging themselves off a cliff, this lot may end up in the back seat of the scene they popularised.

FOR FANS OF: Chelsea Grin, Job For A Cowboy, Despised Icon

MATT MILLS

PRESS

Zulu are instigating a riot of the righteous

ZULU

A New Tomorrow

FLATSPOT

LA hardcore punks shatter all boundaries on their debut blast

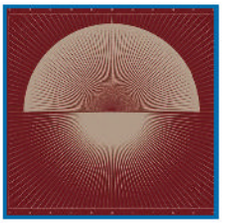
IT'S BEEN AMAZING to see the growth, boundaries and perspectives in hardcore hugely widen over the last few years. We've had Turnstile, Soul Glo and Code Orange – and, with this debut album, LA quintet Zulu can be added to the list of bands that are warping the genre into new and groundbreaking directions. And, on this occasion, the deviations take hardcore way outside the boundaries of its pre-established map.

A New Tomorrow more than lives up to its title. This is the classic sound of punk rock, hardcore and powerviolence reimagined and rebred with both the liquid grooves and righteous protest polemic of the golden era of funk and soul. So, while you're spin-kicking through the crushing riffs and furious anger of a song like *Our Day Is Now* or *From Tha Gods To Earth*, don't get too comfortable; the smooth sounds of *Shine Eternally* are always around the corner to surprise you. It's a wild ride, as Zulu can be destructively heavy one moment and gloriously euphoric and inventive the next.

The intention of the record is clear, with vocalist Anaiah Lei's exploration and explanation of experiences as a Black man in the US both a poignant and powerful emotional totem to drive the album. By the time we get to the wonderfully expressive hip hop of *We're More Than This* it's almost worthless comparing Zulu to other current hardcore peers. Instead, their lineage belongs alongside the revolutionary likes of Sly And The Family Stone, Rage Against The Machine and Public Enemy. Big words indeed, but *A New Tomorrow* is unquestionably cut from the same cloth as those bands at their best; the mutinous spirit of those artists, both in their refusal to be sonically pigeonholed and in their pure defiance against the system that tried to marginalise them, is the thing that makes Zulu so special and singular. In *A New Tomorrow*, it's led to the first absolutely essential album of 2023.

FOR FANS OF: Soul Glo, Moor Mother, Jesus Piece

STEPHEN HILL



STONED JESUS

Father Of Light

SEASON OF MIST

Ukrainian progressive doom hellraisers take the high road

Incorporating grunge and prog into its doom stew, these Ukrainians' fifth album has a lot on its mind. The sombre *Thoughts And Prayers* is a meditation on the empty promises of social media. The dark and menacing *Get What You Deserve* is about climate change. Their biggest guns are saved for the epic, 11-minute, groin thunder of *Season Of The Witch*. It's an ode to the endtimes that sounds like a futuristic prog-metal band discovering the hedonistic joys of Mountain. While hardly a party album, *Father Of Light* will ably serve the dope smokers and hellraisers among us, but fans of more nuanced, thoughtful doom metal will also find plenty to chew on.

FOR FANS OF: Uncle Acid And The Deadbeats, Elder Soundgarden

KEN McINTYRE

TO THE GRAVE

Director's Cuts

UNIQUE LEADER

Aussie extreme metallers shine a light on inconvenient truths

To The Grave have yielded one of this year's most kinetic and grotesquely violent albums so far. Having made a name for themselves touring with Parkway Drive and Thy Art Is Murder, they've made their mission statement clear as crystal. Lyrically, it exposes societies' despicable side as well as humankind's destructive impact on the world, with animal cruelty taking centre stage. Moulding contemporary death metal with a healthy sprinkle of nu metal, the album's thick atmosphere and volatile riffs complement vocalist Dane Evans' monstrous persona that comes off as unpredictable and psychopathic. A terrifying and gripping listen throughout.

FOR FANS OF: The Black Dahlia Murder, Aborted, Humanity's Last Breath

HYWEL DAVIES

TULUS

Fandens Kall

SOULSELLER

Oslo's black metal OGs keep expanding their arsenal

Nearly three decades after their corrosive 1996 debut, Tulus's seventh album is a belligerent swipe at black metal's confines. With thick, spiralling basslines and hammering grooves, *Slagmark* and *Sjelesmerte* recall the devilish black'n' roll aesthetic of 2020's *Old Old Death*. For purists, tracks like *Snømyrkre* and *Isråk* unleash Norwegian black metal in all its primal glory, while *Bloddråpesvermer* and *Samuelsbrenna* mix spectral flourishes of piano and acoustic guitar to stirring effect. The integrating motif is the use of black metal as a foundational element within broader sonic textures, and it makes for a thoroughly enjoyable listen. Across Tulus's expansive, shapeshifting career, *Fandens Kall* notches a compelling new high.

FOR FANS OF: Carpathian Forest, Djevel, Slegest

JOE DALY

PRESS/ALICE BAXLEY

UNFELLED
Pall Of Endless Perdition
SEASON OF MIST

Woods Of Desolation mainman heads back to the old school

Founding multi-instrumentalist D. released a demo tape as Unfelled in 2017 – another solo black metal band to add to the enigmatic Australian's other projects, Woods Of Desolation and Forest Mysticism. The tree obsession remains intact here, although on the full-length debut D. has filled out the line-up with seasoned fulltime growler Mitch Keepin and Drudkh drummer Vlad, whose patronage is a good pointer to the nature of the record. Melodies are icily imperious and hummable, but they're hidden in the cacophonous blizzard of sound, picked out in eerie treble with a swarm-of-hornets guitar tone. Where Woods Of Desolation have taken a journey through depressive strains of post-black metal, Unfelled reconnect with the raw, cryptic violence of the Nordic old-school. Quaintly nostalgic perhaps, but *...Perdition* is a satisfying blast of pagan savagery nonetheless.

FOR FANS OF: Drudkh, Immortal, Winterfylleth

CHRIS CHANTLER

VISCERA
Carcinogenesis
UNIQUE LEADER

Ex-Heart Of A Coward frontman keeps the deathcore torch aflame

Deathcore is experiencing a purple patch right now, with bands like Spite and Ingested shattering eardrums around the globe. Viscera, bringing together former members of Heart Of A Coward and Martyr Defiled among others, are gunning for the top of the tree as well. This second record is a handy stepping stone on their journey to that promised land. The opening title track is a hefty slab of blastbeats and wailing guitars, while *Resolver* dips its toes into blackened death metal territory. *Demon Queen* might bring the overall pace down slightly, but its chug and brooding vocal pattern give the track an intriguing and satisfying industrial edge. Much like the last couple of years, deathcore is going to have an excellent 2023 if *Carcinogenesis* is anything to go by.

FOR FANS OF: Thy Art Is Murder, Enterprise Earth, Humanity's Last Breath

ELLIOT LEAVER

WITCH RIPPER
The Flight After The Fall
MAGNETIC EYE

Seattle's sci-fi riff-wielders prepare to raise the dead

Witch Ripper's second album tells an arcane and involved sci-fi tale usually reserved for half-sized, dusty, used book shop finds – one that involves "...a mad professor, his dying wife, cryogenic chambers, a black hole as well as themes of love, failure, loss, and acceptance." Grandiose concepts deserve grandiose musical backing and this Seattle quartet serve it up on a gleaming platter. The epic *Icarus Equation* sports Queen-like vocal and guitar harmonies, *The Obsidian Forge* somehow serves as a sequel to classic Metallica instrumentals and the two-part *Everlasting In Retrograde* successfully plays the progressive largess of Mastodon's *Leviathan* off of vocal hooks designed for AOR radio. *The Flight After The Fall* certainly, and progressively, soars above advance billing to provide a suitable soundtrack to a dense and thoughtful storyline.

FOR FANS OF: Elder, Baroness, Mastodon

KEVIN STEWART-PANKO

WRETCHED FATE
Carnal Heresy
REDEFINING DARKNESS

All hail the Swede smell of chameleonic death

Few would dispute the pedigree and power of Swedish death metal, but the legendary Stockholm sound, HM-2 pedals and all, is not the only game in town. Hailing from Orsa, Wretched Fate adhere to a different school of brutality, fuelled by the deranged intensity of bands like Vomitory and Deranged, with only occasional hints of the Entombed and Grave worship that one might expect. The results of this gently maverick approach crackle with the pompous fervour of mid-90s big-budget death metal, but with a filthy underbelly that warps every riff and frequently steers the ship in a more dissonant, ugly direction. Sounding every bit as grimly violent as songs on 2019 debut *Fleshletting*, the feral and fiery likes of *Mind Desecrator*, *Momentary Suicide* and pitiless, atmospheric closer *Spineless Horror* herald the presence of multiple worthwhile forks in the left-hand path.

FOR FANS OF: Vomitory, Bloodbath, Grave

DOM LAWSON

RESURRECTIONS

Unearthing the latest metal reissues

Motörhead made sure to go out with a bang

IT WOULD BE slightly disingenuous to claim that **MOTÖRHEAD** never made a shoddy album (it's called *March Or Die*, just FYI) but the band's focus and consistency really did last right until the bitter end. An expanded version of Lemmy's final musical statement, *Bad Magic: Seriously Bad Magic* (Silver Lining Music) **[8]** is a solid testament to the efficacy of his band's last and most enduring line-up. If songs like *Thunder & Lightning* and *Electricity* don't make you want to run through a brick wall, there's something wrong with you. Meanwhile, a bonus disc containing a full live set from Mt Fuji Rock Festival in 2015 is predictably thrilling.

The legendary *Roadrunner United: The Concert* (Roadrunner) **[9]** from December 2005 is finally receiving the lavish triple vinyl rerelease it deserves. It was a raucous celebration of heavy metal at the turn of the century, with an icon-stuffed core band and countless special guests raging through choice cuts from that year's *The All-Star Sessions* album and a generous dose of label-specific covers. Eighteen years on, it still sounds like a total riot. A closing *Roots Bloody Roots*, sung by Robb Flynn, Corey Taylor and Howard Jones, sums it up. Fucking *bedlam*.

LEPROUS have a habit of reducing people to ecstatic tears, particularly in the live arena. *Aphelion (Tour Edition)* **[8]** combines the Norwegian band's miraculous 2021 full-length with two bonus tracks and 40 minutes of live material from 2022. It is, as you might imagine, beautiful and bombastic in equal measure. A climactic reading of *The Sky Is Red* is one dazzling highlight among many.

Strong contenders for the 21st century's most righteous doom metal band, Finnish legends **REVEREND BIZARRE** plainly belong on vinyl. Celebrating its 20th anniversary with a lavish new wax incarnation of their debut album, *In The Rectory Of The Bizarre Reverend* (Svart) **[9]** still sucks the oxygen from the room with sheer nihilistic gloominess, and songs like the 13-minute *Sodoma Sunrise* remain as unrelenting and undeniable as death itself.

DOM LAWSON

MOTORHEAD: PRESS/ROBERT JOHN

LIVE REVIEWS

TRIVIUM

HEAVEN SHALL BURN / MALEVOLENCE

HAMMERSMITH APOLLO, LONDON

Orlando's unflagging metal warriors light the way for the next generation

MATT HEAFY IS totally in his element. Standing in front of a backdrop of fearsome dragons and tattooed samurai, he lets out the scream. *'In the court of the dragonnnnn!'* Due to Covid, it's been *four years* since Trivium played the UK – a long time away from their second home in the first country that truly embraced them. In that time, they've released career-best albums in 2020's *What The Dead Men Say* and 2021's *In The Court Of The Dragon*. This tour is *long* overdue.

Due to a police investigation into a crowd-crush tragedy at Brixton Academy, in which two people lost their lives, tonight's show has been moved to the historic Hammersmith Apollo. **MALEVOLENCE** frontman Alex Taylor makes clear it's a "bucket list" venue he's dreamt of playing. After last year's acclaimed third album, *Malicious Intent*, plus the hype generated by supporting Architects and playing summer festivals, it's obvious Shit is going to Go Down. But, thanks to Alex's irrepressible excitement, it *really* Goes Down.

Swaggering onstage to an intro tape of Inner Circle's *Bad Boys*, in front of a packed room at 7pm on a Sunday, the Sheffielders pull out the likes of *Life Sentence* and *Still Waters Run Deep* – blistering examples of their northern-by-way-of-NOLA hardcore. Hands and horns shoot up from front to back – but *Self Supremacy* explodes into *that* now-viral circle-pit. Alex goads the crowd into action by playing them off against the fans from last night's Manchester show, and while everyone moves closer to the stage at his urging, somehow the floor opens up like every metalcore singer's wildest dream. At the song's end, Alex throws himself off the stage, proclaiming London better. Doubling down on the rabble-rousing, he encourages crowdsurfers to surmount the barricade during *Remain Unbeaten*, and by closer *On Broken Glass*, we're wondering if punters will have anything left for the next three hours.

Malevolence take their Claw Machine skills to the next level

THE SET

TRIVIUM

Rain
A Gunshot To The Head Of Trepidation
The Sin And The Sentence
Down From The Sky
Catastrophist
Strife
Amongst The Shadows & The Stones
The Deceived
In The Court Of The Dragon
To The Rats
The Heart From Your Hate
Shogun
In Waves
Pull Harder On The Strings Of Your Martyr

Amid a flurry of headbanging, German melodeath veterans **HEAVEN SHALL BURN** launch into *My Heart And The Ocean* from latest album *Of Truth And Sacrifice*, bathed in blood-red light and interested less in audience participation than getting their heads down and ripping. The grooving riff from *Übermacht* inspires a man dressed as a banana to lurch around the pit. From *Combat* onwards there's no let-up, vocalist Marcus Bischoff leaning into the extremity with arms outstretched. They're nailing every song, thanks to the wisdom of their years – "Shout out to Malevolence," says Marcus at one point. "What a great band and so young, they could be my children!" But with little variation in pace, and playing London for the first time since 2014, they're not as familiar or *fun* as the openers.

That said, Hammersmith Apollo is thoroughly warmed. When the curtain drops, **TRIVIUM** tear into *Rain* and *A Gunshot To The Head Of Trepidation*, in a nostalgic double callback to breakthrough album *Ascendancy*. The difference is, they are much more self-assured than they were in 2005, Matt Heafy throwing the horns, sticking his tongue out and joking around simply because he's enjoying himself, rather than trying to prove he's the next James Hetfield. "It feels good to be back home, my friends," he tells the crowd. "Nineteen years later, we still have the greatest fucking supporters on the planet. Now we have one song left for you… ha ha ha! Can you imagine?!"

Echoing Malevolence, Matt says Manchester was the best show of the tour – in fact, the best show *ever* – and can London prove we're better? We know it's a well-worn clichéd tactic, we've already played along once this evening, but we don't care: we can do this *allllllll* night. He encourages a clap-along during *The Sin And The Sentence*, while in the middle of *Down From The Sky*, he looks upwards and flexes his not insubstantial guns. "I feel like a personal trainer," he confesses of his hype-man antics by the time we get to *To The Rats* – although there's an affectionate outbreak of boos when he mentions it's from much-maligned album *The Crusade*. This feels like a greatest hits set, with only *Catastrophist, Amongst The Shadows & The Stones* and *In The Court Of The Dragon* aired from the newest records.

Trivium have had a bumpy road to success, and it's heartening to see them not only thriving in 2023 but championing the next generation. For *The Deceived*, they invite Malevolence's Alex Taylor and guitarist Josh Baines back onstage, neither of whom can conceal their joy at living out their childhood fantasies. Before *In Waves*, Matt shouts out a litany of young UK bands who are watching: Heriot, Bleed From Within, Urne, Vexed, Wargasm and more. Somewhere along the way, his band have become the institution.

Ending with *Pull Harder On The Strings Of Your Martyr* – it had to be – tonight is a killer party and a triumphant homecoming. "We are Trivium," Matt Heafy finishes. "We will always fucking return."

ELEANOR GOODMAN

Trivium's Matt Heafy: a frontman of taste and distinction

Heaven Shall Burn inspire the crowd to go bananas

JAKE OWENS

Sleep Token: Vessel's cult expands its reach

Northlane: cut from a different cloth

SLEEP TOKEN

NORTHLANE

HAMMERSMITH APOLLO, LONDON

UK's shadowy pop/metal missionaries cast their spell over west London

HAVING WELCOMED IN the new year with a surprise smattering of singles that embraced everything from hip hop to prog metal, Sleep Token have once again proved that their radical genre-bending formula works. While heavy music with pop hooks is certainly not a new thing, Vessel and his band are dissolving genre boundaries with a greater force than anyone before, with a sound that, at its lightest, is reminiscent of mainstream artists such as Rag'n'Bone Man and Imagine Dragons. And when these new songs are debuted in a live setting tonight at Hammersmith's Apollo, they highlight exactly what modern metal has been waiting for.

On the final date of this sold-out UK tour, **NORTHLANE** kick things off as a fitting and galvanising introduction to an evening of genre-flipping curveballs. Firing out a meticulous mishmash of thumping nu metal, electronica and rigorous metalcore, the Aussies drive their energy metre firmly into the red.

Draped in black velvet, **SLEEP TOKEN** materialise like a group of disconcerting apparitions, opening with new singles *Chokehold* and *The Summoning*. Immediately, fans latch onto every lyric of these fresh songs like they're welcome classics. Meanwhile, Vessel creeps, skitters and jolts around the stage, part panicked insect, part teenager tentatively dancing around their bedroom.

Sleep Token's powerful versatility appears most prominently during *Hypnosis*, with its pummelling riffs that seethe and pull against the bubblegum, shiny pop of its radio-friendly chorus. *Alkaline* conjures the same feeling, its crooning choruses and sickly-sweet vocals set against riffs that sound like they're ripping through the Earth's crust with every thrust.

Towards the end of the set, emotions run high as Vessel lets out sobs during the beautiful *The Night Does Not Belong To God*. His reaction is unsurprising; if 'worship' (Sleep Token's mantra) is what they've been looking for, then worship is exactly what has taken place tonight.

With the entirety of the crowd on their feet with arms outstretched for a closing performance of *The Offering*, the show comes to an end, leaving the congregation spellbound by this exciting hybrid form of metal. While it's unclear whether Sleep Token will manage to get the more intolerant metalheads onboard, especially during their long-winded wanders into pop and hip hop, it's obvious their diverse talents could take them anywhere. Whatever they do, and however they do it, we'll be watching… and worshipping.

LIZ SCARLETT

EVILE

CRYPTIC SHIFT

LIMELIGHT 2, BELFAST

It's a bitterly cold Sunday night in Belfast, but thankfully the scorching-hot metal of two of the British underground's best is determined to keep everyone toastier than Beelzebub's boudoir. Leeds four-piece **CRYPTIC SHIFT** flex their considerable musical muscles and treat us to some scintillating technical death during their short but savage set. Powerful, precise and wearing their Chuck Schuldiner influences on their sleeves, their prog-speckled sound is a welcome assault on the senses. **EVILE** quickly remind everyone why they're still the UK's kings of thrash with a bloodthirsty rendition of *Gore*. The swaggering *Head Of The Demon* follows shortly after, and that filthy, groove-laden lead riff sounds absolutely anthemic, as does the lightning-fast, suitably monstrous *The Thing (1982)*. Witnessing a set that spans Evile's near-20-year career, the audience now features two generations of fans as Eddie Munson-maned newcomers merrily mosh alongside the grizzled veterans during classics like *Killer From The Deep* and the super-catchy *Cult*. Ol Drake has really grown into his role as frontman too, after taking over from his brother Matt in 2020, and ensures all Irish eyes are smiling… and heads are banging.

EDWIN McFEE

TWILIGHT FORCE

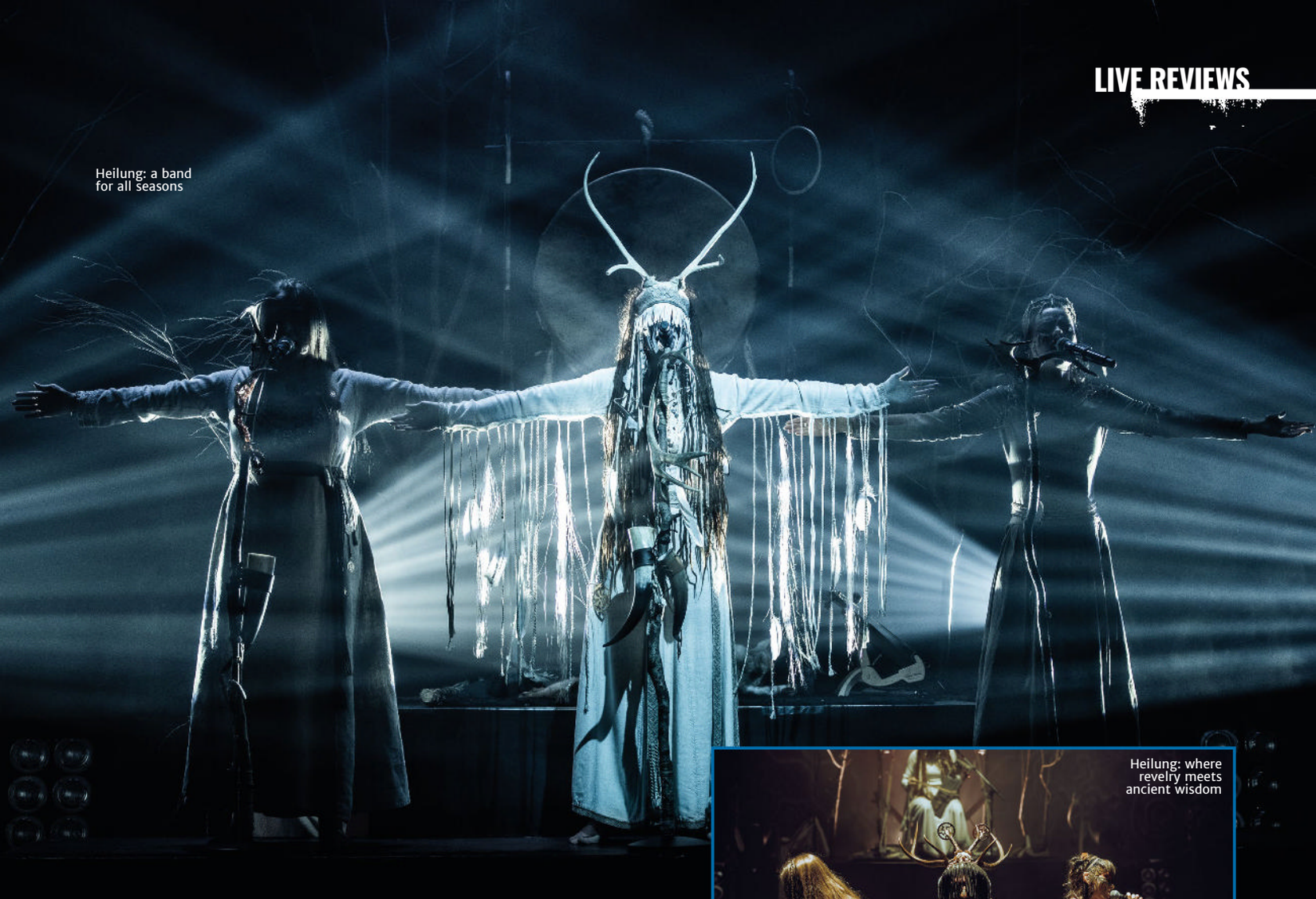
SEVEN SPIRES

THE UNDERWORLD, LONDON

A surefire way to beat out any winter blues is gloriously over-the-top, blindingly glossy power metal. Twilight Force have clearly got that in spades. Main support **SEVEN SPIRES** don't quite reach the same levels of indulgence, but they're certainly bombastic. Fist-pumping anthems are delivered with gusto, and to a reception that's usually reserved for a headliner, likely because it's their first ever London show. It's unfortunate that the bass overwhelms the rest of the mix at times, but from the melodeath *Gods Of Debauchery* to the carnivalesque *The Cabaret Of Dreams*, it's a thundering set. **TWILIGHT FORCE** not only have the most power metal name but the outfits to boot; every member is decked out like they've just finished LARPing, complete with horns, capes and elf ears. They back that up with fret-busting guitar acrobatics, wailing vocals and enough cheese to poison every lactose intolerant person in the UK. In short, it's utterly ludicrous, ostentatious and delivered with a knowing wink that says everyone knows it's daft but is simply having way too much fun to care.

WILL MARSHALL

DEREK BREMNER



Heilung: a band for all seasons

Heilung: where revelry meets ancient wisdom

HEILUNG

EIVØR / LILI REFRAIN

HAMMERSMITH APOLLO, LONDON

Shamanic folk icons host a night of wild reverie

EVEN IF IT hadn't been long delayed by Covid, tonight was always going to be a *release*. Heilung's powerful, worldwide connection with their fans isn't just because of pop culture's obsession with Vikings, or because the Scandi-German folk collective wear antlers and have instruments made with human bones. In today's world, the desire to escape the grind and embrace the primal is strong – and a Heilung show is the most fun way to do it.

Up first tonight is Italian solo artist **LILI REFRAIN**, her heavy, ritualistic sounds, operatic voice and dynamic performance commanding both stage and a vocally enamoured crowd. Faroese folk artist **EIVØR PÁLSDÓTTIR** has had her music feature in shows like *The Last Kingdom*. Her stunning, classically trained voice is the focus, going from glorious to demonic in a flash.

All **HEILUNG** shows start with an opening ceremony – a horn blowing, a ritual cleansing, and everyone congregating in a circle and repeating the mantra: "Remember that we all are brothers." While the impact of a Heilung show is more magical when outside in nature, and the grand art deco surroundings of the Apollo might seem at odds with their primitive vibes, it provides a suitably dramatic backdrop for tonight's ritual, and Heilung still bring nature with them, from the branches that adorn their instruments to the gong that glows bright like the moon.

Heilung are a big crew. The core trio – Maria Franz, ethereal in antlers and white fringing; Kai Uwe Faust, emanating shamanic power as he stalks the stage barefoot; and Christopher Juul, leading the music masterfully if relatively inconspicuously – are joined by raging percussionists, backing singers who swirl around the stage, and the prowling warrior choir, who ignite howls and whoops from the audience – many of whom are wearing their own warrior look.

With throat singing, chanting, rhythmic percussion and sounds of nature, musically Heilung are a hypnotic sonic feast, and visually, they're more spectacular than ever.

The show is wildly theatrical, with every song feeling like a whole story within itself, whether Maria and Kai are locking antlers or a warrior woman is roaming the stage holding flames above her head. The breathtaking lightshow adds to the impact, shifting the mood and varying from jagged and fast to soft and atmospheric. Often, there's so much going on onstage that you don't know where to look – but it never feels messy. For the closing song, *Hamrer Hippyer*, however, chaos reigns, and everyone lets loose: dancing and chanting in a haze of light that looks like fire. A bacchanal for all ages.

HANNAH MAY KILROY

PRESS

Tarja Turunen: still the vanguard of operatic metal

TARJA

TEMPERANCE

ELECTRIC BALLROOM, LONDON

Finland's operatic standard bearer brings the epic and the intimate

TARJA TURUNEN IS one of the most iconic and instantly recognisable voices in metal, so it's only fitting that her support band should have an exceptional calibre of vocalist too. Setting the scene tonight are Italian metallers **TEMPERANCE**, who bring high energy and even higher notes to the Ballroom with a trio of singers who soar up the scales with ease. It's not hard to picture the band on a bigger stage, and they do a great job of getting the audience ready for the symphonic queen herself.

Tonight marks **TARJA**'s long-awaited return to London, and she's on fine form. Surrounded by brilliant musicians such as cellist Max Lilja and legendary bassist Doug Wimbish, she indulges in a lengthy set drawing largely on her heavier, more uptempo material like the aggressive *Demons In You* and *Anteroom of Death*.

She's a consummate performer, and her most captivating quality is how seamlessly she switches between the 'opera diva' persona and her real self. When she's singing, she's in character, inhabiting the drama of the music: her face stony one moment and animated the next. But she always breaks into a huge, warm grin at the end of every song. During the only Nightwish song in the set, *Wishmaster*, her delivery is almost verging on tongue in cheek, with a knowing smile on her face throughout; you get the feeling that she's only delving into her past out of love for her audience.

Tarja's also not afraid to skewer people's perceptions of her, which is never more apparent than during the fantastic, piercing riposte, *Diva*. While the D-word is clearly a label she's not comfortable with – nor one that she deserves – she's only too happy to gently poke fun at herself while playing the part for the sake of the performance, with a heavy dose of irony. "Oh, that song," she says afterwards, shaking her head and laughing. "It kills me every time."

The night's softer moment comes as a heartfelt medley of *The Golden Chamber (Loputon Yö)* and *You And I*, during which the singer is alone onstage with just a keyboard, and it makes for a sweet, intimate reprieve from the theatrics. Ever the professional, she comes back for an encore of no fewer than four songs, the highlight of which is undoubtedly *I Walk Alone* – the power ballad that started her solo career 16 years ago, and a reminder that she's had to build herself back up from scratch by herself. It makes nights like this all the more impressive.

CATHERINE MORRIS

GODFLESH

ZETRA

229, LONDON

The first of two nights, featuring pre-breakup and post-reformation sets respectively, this could have been an exercise in rigorous nostalgia, if only Godflesh's music – some of it 35 years old – didn't speak so directly to our present. If you're feeling helplessly yoked to monolithic forces, on both immediate and existential levels, this is ground zero. That the packed crowd is a mix of old and new fans isn't just down to the support of darkwave darlings **ZETRA**. More in tune with Godflesh vocalist Justin Broadrick's interim project, Jesu, their lush, synth-driven laments, and Type O-style, ankle-weight grooves capture a decadent, very 80s mood that proves immersive, if still in need of dynamics. **GODFLESH**'s own dynamics are a pitiless, groundhog grind. As seminal as the pneumatic drive and the dub-laden punch-drunk vocals of *Veins*, and the no-man's-land, looped artillery barrage of *Pulp* have proven to be, the masochistic repetition becomes unifying and ecstatic, as Justin and bassist Benny Green are backed by a drum machine and projected hellish and religious images. A plea for deliverance from the most visceral of depths.

JONATHAN SELZER

L.S. DUNES

O2 ACADEMY 2, BIRMINGHAM

Stepping into the venue, you'd be forgiven for thinking you'd wandered into an emo cult meet-up. Everywhere you look there's neon hair and hand-stitched L.S. Dunes patches, and it looks like everyone in the front row is sporting an L.S.D tattoo. While it may be the band's debut UK tour, the enthusiasm is unsurprising. With members of Thursday, Coheed And Cambria, My Chemical Romance and more at the helm, the collective is truly a patchwork of emo's finest. When they hit the stage, Anthony Green is set on wreaking havoc, devilishly rubbing his hands together. *Bombsquad* immediately throws the crowd into a post-hardcore haze. Anthony's vocals are spiteful and deliciously bitter, and bodies constantly fly overhead in appreciation. *Permanent Rebellion* only amps up the circle-pits, as Anthony jokingly warns the crowd to stay vigilant. While the punchier, crowd-rousing anthems are a delight, *Grifter* and *Sleep Cult* are stand-outs, their focus on instrumentation highlighting what sets L.S. Dunes apart from the rest. Yes, it's an alliance of Warped Tour favourites, but it's also a collection of exceptional musicians, all transfixed by their instrument, their years of experience blindingly clear, fusing together to create something glorious.

EMILY SWINGLE

TINA KORHONEN

Epica's budget hadn't gone to waste

WILL IRELAND

APOCALYPTICA / EPICA

WHEEL

ROUNDHOUSE, LONDON

Symphonic titans forge a wildly resonant alliance

Apocalyptica bow to the greats

IT'S A FEAT to get the never-ending queue through bag check in time for **WHEEL**, but an ample crowd manage to catch the opening act, who still sound like Tool for part-time Tool fans – all the proficiency, off-kilter rhythms and brooding atmosphere without the pretentious 10-minute ramblings.

Originally planned for 2020, this delayed co-headlining tour has allowed **EPICA**'s 2001 album, *Omega*, to bed in, and tonight the songs from it explode with the ferocity and virtue these symphonic metallers deserve. From the galloping *Abyss Of Time* to swelling, dark fairytale *The Skeleton Key*, they cement this band's continual evolution. But while a certain amount of shapeshifting is key to Epica's career, their heaviness is their mainstay. The hard-hitting *Fools Of Damnation* – a song quick to lean on string segments on record – is a gnarly, blackened, guitar-focused hit tonight, while *The Essence Of Silence* sees Isaac Delahaye shredding for his life.

If there is a stark brutality to the band's live persona, it's tempered by Simone Simons, whose measured elegance and crystalline tones bring an expansive air to the rough'n'ready backdrop. On *Omega* highlight *Code Of Life*, her soprano vocals work triumphantly with Coen Janssen's Middle-Eastern keytaring, and they soar above the torch-bearing crowd during quiet ballad *Rivers*. By the time a singalong ensues for *Beyond The Matrix*, there's an air of collective enthralment as the crowd reflect the words back at Simone – but not without one last chance for a bruising, as the circle-pit swells on parting song *Consign To Oblivion*.

If there's any doubt that three cellists and a drummer can equal the bang-for-your-buck buffet that was Epica, then the first resonant sweeps of *Ashes Of The Modern World* settles it. There's a reason why **APOCALYPTICA** are revered; beyond their obvious talent as classical musicians, their unrelenting thirst for creating otherworldly sounds is something special, and tonight those powers are harnessed throughout a set that encompasses a mix of vocal-led tracks, covers and a few hot takes from 2020's *Cell-0*. Bringing an extra spark of entertainment to the show, vocalist Franky Perez belts out *Not Strong Enough* like a stadium rock star, but it's a guest appearance by Simone on *Rise Again* that summons the sharpest intake of breath. A teaser of *Thunderstruck* and the thrash triumvirate of *Nothing Else Matters, Inquisition Symphony* and *Seek & Destroy* is the dose of physicality the Roundhouse needs to send the symphonic metalheads in the pit over the edge.

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Life Of Agony's fans definitely have time for Mina Caputo

Madball's Freddy Cricien stirs up another pit

LIFE OF AGONY

MADBALL / TARA WHO?

THE DOME, LONDON

New York's alt metal masters recharge their incendiary, classic debut

IT LOOKS LIKE the entire 90s have turned up. Not only that, a beyond-packed Dome is also rammed with people celebrating an album that's older than they are. But three decades on, as much as Life Of Agony's *River Runs Red* remains a flagship of New York's early 90s metal scene, its impassioned rollercoaster ride through themes of gender, abandonment and mental health feels every bit as keyed into our current moment as it did back then.

Tonight's supports also illuminate the headliners' journey. Sonically, **TARA WHO?** have roots in the 90s alt punk era of The Breeders, keeping the grit and metronomic groove, if not all the playfulness as Tara Carpenter's acerbic vocals drive them along a linear path, but there's a smouldering power invoked throughout. **MADBALL**, of course, are out-of-the-gates explosive, *Can't Stop, Won't Stop* an ethos-defining statement, albeit just over a minute long. "We get pigeonholed as a hardcore band," says frontman Freddy Cricien of his NYHC bastions, and it's not a complaint, but he has a point. Packed into their pit-inciting blasts is a huge amount of variety, from thrash and d-beats to the stripped-down and elastic grooves of hometown contemporaries Prong and Helmet, but it all adds up to an exhilarating melee as all sections of the crowd go wild.

LIFE OF AGONY are welcomed ecstatically like the source of long-pent-up release, and as *This Time* dips into *that* Sabbathian riff, there's a collective, revelatory sense of This. Is. Fucking. Happening. racing throughout the venue. Blurring the lines between hardcore and metal, LOA's debut was emblematic of a scene born in crisis: them, Type O, Prong, Helmet and Unsane all testing the limits of broken masculinity, whether through rigid minimalism or molten self-immolation, and the riffs tonight are still like lava churning over the rockiest of terrain. With that rich voice in full force, Mina Caputo is an eccentric and inexhaustibly charismatic guide, cheekily lifting up her ripped t-shirt to curious front row onlookers, and embodying both the fraught potency of the songs and the night's air of celebration.

From the opener's plea to indifferent fathers, through the title track's pump-action anthem of desperation to the churned hardcore of *The Stain Remains*, it's the sound of keeping your head above the water through raging currents, all aural muscle-mass and fever-ridden catharsis. The encore's *Scars* and *Weeds* offer a looser, more readily uplifting vibe, that ride ending on a deliriously sated high.

JONATHAN SELZER

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Leprous set controls for the heart of the prog

JAMES SHARROCK

LEPROUS

MONUMENTS / KALANDRA

SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE, LONDON

Norway's progressive voyagers reach a point of rapture

LEPROUS ARE PROOF progressive music, with its technicality or more cerebral songcraft, can still be packed full of hooks. It's fitting, then, that openers **KALANDRA** exemplify this sentiment, albeit from an entirely new angle. Katrine Stenbekk's vocals are entrancing, layered atop each other to create a haunting beauty. A bowed bass during opener *Veiviseren* adds to the folky atmosphere, but by *Naive* they've morphed into a prog rock spectacle carrying all the emotion of before with a renewed intensity. The appearance of an as-yet-untitled horn-led song mid-set elevates the sense of space both in volume and being otherworldly. It's enrapturing, giving Monuments an incredibly tough act to follow.

Despite the massive shift in tone between bands – and with **MONUMENTS** being something of a stylistic outlier tonight as the heaviest, most 'metal' band on the bill – there's still huge cheers for them, even if they don't get the immediate pits or energy they want. By second song *Opiate*, though, the crowd are more than up for it and vocalist Andy Cizek crowdsurfs with a huge grin. The band sound gigantic, the crispness accentuating their deft musicianship, and Andy's growls are monstrous. His cleaner singing may be a little reedy sometimes, but it doesn't detract from the quartet's tour de force of progressive metal.

Throbbing bass, haze and red lighting heralds the arrival of **LEPROUS**, before Einar Solberg's crystalline voice cuts through the air. Opening with the subdued *Have You Ever?* before a soaring *The Price* is a reminder of just how unmistakeable and charismatic their music and presence are, with lighting synced to every staccato drum beat and guitar chord. Baard Kolstad is seemingly octo-limbed as he effortlessly switches between time signatures, providing a deceptively simple anchor point for their ever-shifting songs. It's meticulously planned and performed without ever losing its emotion, from the thunderous piano chords opening *Running Low* with blue lights flaring, to *The Sky Is Red* and its blaring red lights during the final breakdown that gets the whole crowd moving. Einar's voice is showstopping in its range and expression, but Leprous have never caved to the temptation of making it the sole focus of their music; the instrumentation of *On Hold* is sparsely beautiful, a counterpoint melody to the vocals, while *Running Low* features a stirring cello section to underscore the emotional impact. Leprous don't pull a single punch throughout, offering the prog rock spectacle they're renowned for without a single hitch to a rapt crowd.

WILL MARSHALL

Kalandra reach for the otherworldly

Monuments give the night a heavy metal lift

FIVE MINUTES WITH

MARTIJN WESTERHOLT

DELAIN

In 2021, everyone quit the symphonic metal band except its founding member. Now he's rebuilding anew

WORDS: MATT MILLS

Let's talk about Delain's line-up change. Singer Charlotte Wessels left, along with everyone else. What happened?!
"We did very well in 2019 and 2020. There was a lot of success but, therefore, also a lot of work. When we did the US tour at the end of 2019, I was still tweaking the mixes [on 2020's *Apocalypse & Chill*]. I was checking out mixes in the morning, preparing for shows in the afternoon, and then playing in the evening. Then we had the European tour and an album release, so I burnt out."

How did that affect your relationship with the rest of the band?
"We talked about how we'd continue and I wanted to take it easy on shows, but the three guys [guitarist Timo Somers, bassist Otto Schimmelpenninck and drummer Joey de Boer] wanted something completely different. They wanted a complete change in how everything goes, including who makes the music. Charlotte's position was, 'You guys have to figure it out. If you can't, I'd rather focus on my own career.'"

Why did the others want to change how the band worked?
"They wanted me to not play live at all and wanted an equal say in the music. I've been writing Delain music for more than 20 years, our drummer was 23 and our bassist had never written a note for Delain: I'm not gonna let those people tell me what works and what doesn't! I offered them, 'You continue with [the band name] Delain,' but then Guus [Eikens, songwriter] said, 'If you're going, I'm going too.' There'd be no songwriting team anymore! They might have produced a really cool album, but it wouldn't have sounded like Delain."

At what point was Charlotte like, 'This is too much. I'm out'?
"When it was clear that the guys and me couldn't reach an agreement.

"MY SCAR NEEDS A LOT OF TIME TO HEAL"

So, December 2020. Delain is, in majority, my band."

Are you and Charlotte on good terms, at least?
"I haven't spoken to her for more than a year. It's still very painful to me and, I can imagine, also to them, because we worked very closely together for a long time. It's a scar and it needs a lot of time to heal."

Once the rest of the band had left, was there this feeling of 'What the hell do I do now?'
"The thought of, 'Perhaps I should quit' crossed my mind. But in the end, I thought, 'OK, the writing team is still in place,' and I had a lot of support from colleagues and musicians, because I have been doing this for 20 years. Everyone said to me, 'You need to continue.'"

So how did the new line-up come about?
"It was very organic. I always kept in touch with previous members. Sander [Zoer], was our drummer for four albums. Our guitar player [Ronald Landa] was on the first two albums. Our old bass player, Rob [Van Der Loo], is currently in Epica and played on a lot of tracks [on Delain's new album, *Dark Waters*]. And I started searching for singers online, like on YouTube channels, who were doing covers, and at some point I stumbled upon Diana [Leah, vocals]. One week later, she posted a remark on our Instagram account. As a joke, she said, 'Hey, if you ever need a singer… wink…', so I contacted her."

You said you wanted to make *Dark Waters* a "classic" Delain album. Was that so you wouldn't alienate people too much with the new line-up?
"I didn't think that consciously about it. I wrote it the same way I always write, except without Charlotte's brilliant lyrics. The melodies were still business as usual, so I was pretty confident that the sound and vibe would still be there. It's not our heaviest album and there are a lot of poppy songs, but if you asked me why, I couldn't tell you. I'd say the bread comes out of the oven however it comes out."

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SAT 23rd SEPTEMBER 2023

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EMP • IAA TOURS ILIVE

FRANKENSTEIN

ALL METAL TRIBUTE TO THE BEE GEES & BEYOND

X

NANOWAR OF STEEL

APRIL 2023

18	SOUTHAMPTON 1865*	23	SHEFFIELD O2 ACADEMY2	27	LONDON O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON
19	OXFORD O2 ACADEMY2*	24	NEWCASTLE THINK TANK		
20	HULL THE WELLY CLUB	25	LIVERPOOL O2 ACADEMY2	28	DORSET TEDDY ROCKS FESTIVAL
21	CARLISLE THE VENUE	26	BIRMINGHAM O2 INSTITUTE2	29	BRISTOL THEKLA
22	GLASGOW CATHOUSE			30	BRIGHTON PATTERNS

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NAPALM EVENTS

AN ACADEMY EVENTS PRESENTATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH NAPALM EVENTS

*TRAGEDY ONLY

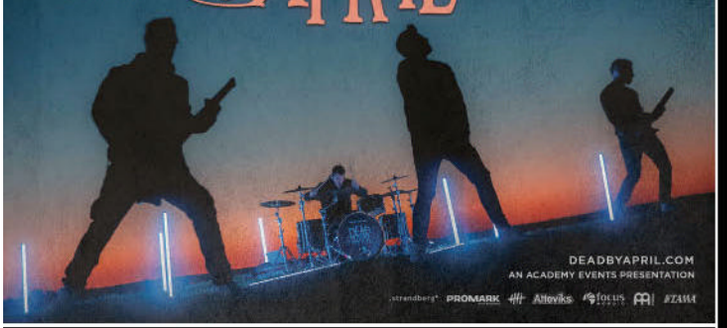
SATURDAY
6th MAY 2023
O2 ACADEMY
ISLINGTON
LONDON

DEAD by APRIL

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

SELF-DECEPTION

AWAKE



DEADBYAPRIL.COM

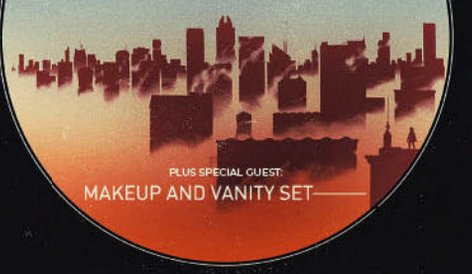
AN ACADEMY EVENTS PRESENTATION

strandberg* PROMARK Ibanez Ateviks focus ZAMA

ACADEMY EVENTS & LIVE NATION BY ARRANGEMENT WITH IAA TOURING AND EAT MUSIC PRESENTS

PROTOMEN

EUROPEAN TOUR 2023



PLUS SPECIAL GUEST:

MAKEUP AND VANITY SET

16.03 **LONDON** O2 SHEPHERD'S BUSH EMPIRE
19.03 **OXFORD** O2 ACADEMY
21.03 **WOLVERHAMPTON** KK's STEELMILL
22.03 **GLASGOW** STEREO
23.03 **BRADFORD** NIGHTRAIN

EAT MUSIC

MASTER BOOT RECORD

C:\>TOUR.EXE /EUROPE /UK

SPREAD THE CODE

SATURDAY 8 APRIL 2023
O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON
LONDON

AN ACADEMY EVENTS PRESENTATION
BY ARRANGEMENT WITH OUT OF LINE MUSIC

OUT OF LINE

20TH ANNIVERSARY

EISBRECHER

EIS OVER EUROPE 2023

PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

MAERZFELD

TUESDAY 9 MAY

O2 ACADEMY ISLINGTON, LONDON

ALREADY PURCHASED TICKETS 2020+2021+2022 REMAIN VALID FOR 2023 DATE!

EMP

EIS-BRECHER.COM

AN ACADEMY EVENTS PRESENTATION

ACADEMY EVENTS BY ARRANGEMENT WITH ECHELON TALENT AGENCY PRESENTS

THROW THE FIGHT

EUROPEAN TOUR 2023

WITH SPECIAL GUESTS

ATENA ELWOOD STRAY

WEDNESDAY 17th MAY

O2 ACADEMY2 ISLINGTON

LONDON

THROWTHEFIGHT.COM

LONG BRANCH RECORDS SPV

FEARLESS VAMPIRE KILLERS

PLUS SPECIAL GUESTS

THURSDAY 30th MARCH 2023

O2 ACADEMY3 BIRMINGHAM

AN ACADEMY EVENTS PRESENTATION

AD INFINITUM turns a new symphonic metal chapter!

AD INFINITUM

CHAPTER III
DOWNFALL

OUT 31.03.

1-CD DIGIPAK | 1-LP GATEFOLD | DIGITAL
LTD. VINYL EDIT. AVAILABLE EXCLUSIVELY VIA NAPALMRECORDS.COM

Parody metal perfection!

NANOWAR OF STEEL

DISLIKE TO FALSE METAL

OUT 10.03.

1-CD DIGISLEEVE | 1-LP PURPLE GATEFOLD | DIGITAL

New York City's famous tribute act put their vibrant metal spin on 14 iconic anthems of fearless fun!

TRASHED

I AM WOMAN

OUT 03.03.

1-CD DIGISLEEVE | 1-LP SILVER GATEFOLD | DIGITAL

The Orchard

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BABYMETAL BACKSTAGE IN TOKYO!

METAL HAMMER

2 EXCLUSIVE COVERS
SABATON & BABYMETAL

9021

PEASANTS! PRIESTS! JOUSTING!

WELCOME TO SABATON ISLAND

ROADRUNNER UNITED
55 MUSICIANS. 2,000 HANGOVERS. ONE LEGACY

BURY TOMORROW
JOIN THEIR SECRET SOCIETY

THE HU
POWERLIFTING! HORSES! SHAMANISM!

MALEVOLENCE
BRITAIN'S WILDEST MOSHPITS HIT EUROPE

9000

+
DELAIN
HERIOT
CAVE IN
CELTIC FROST
FLOOR JANSEN
ENSLAVED
SLEEP TOKEN

FUTURE
ISSUE 372